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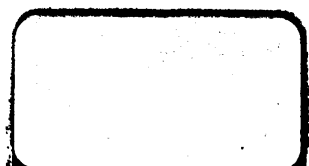
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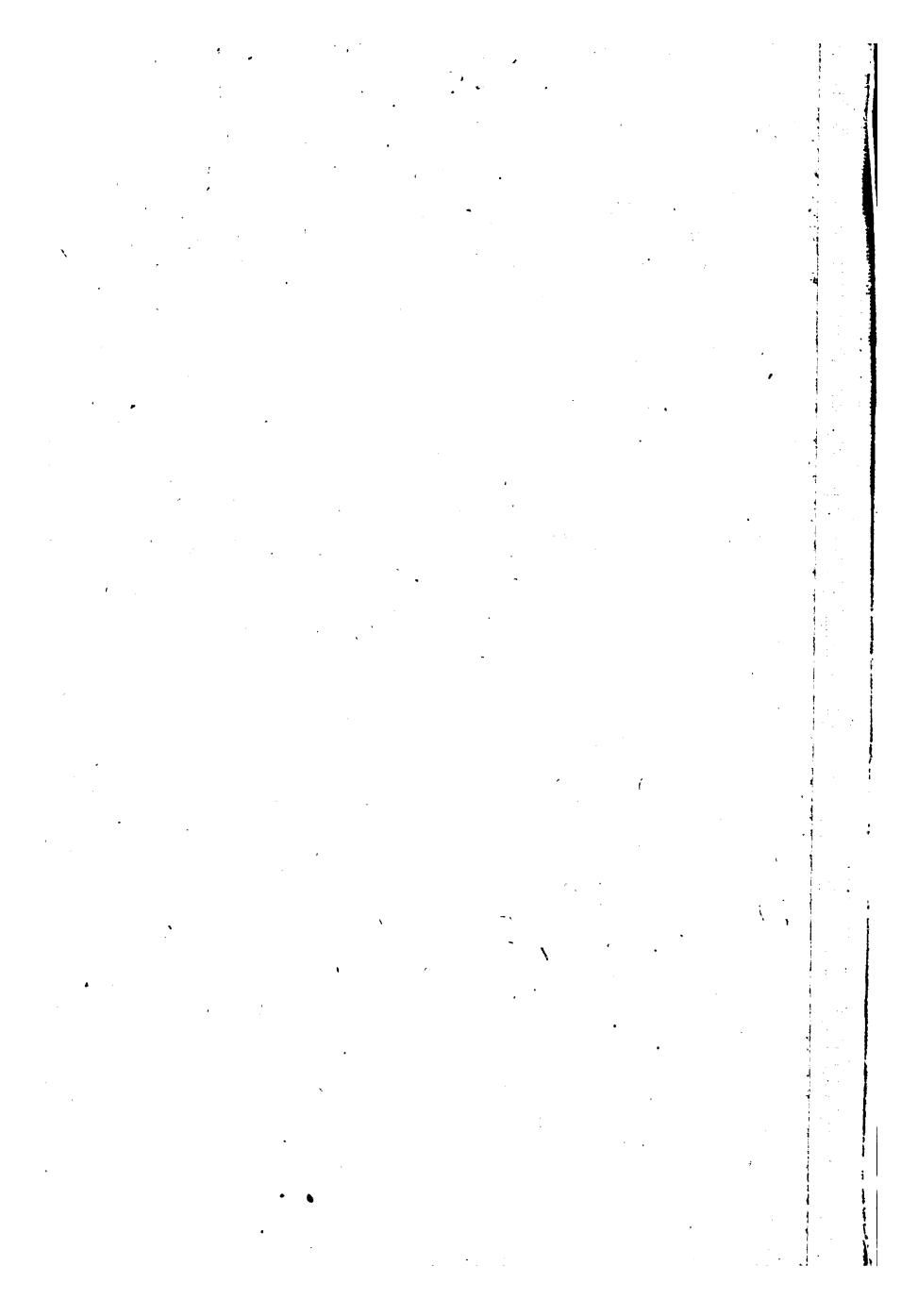
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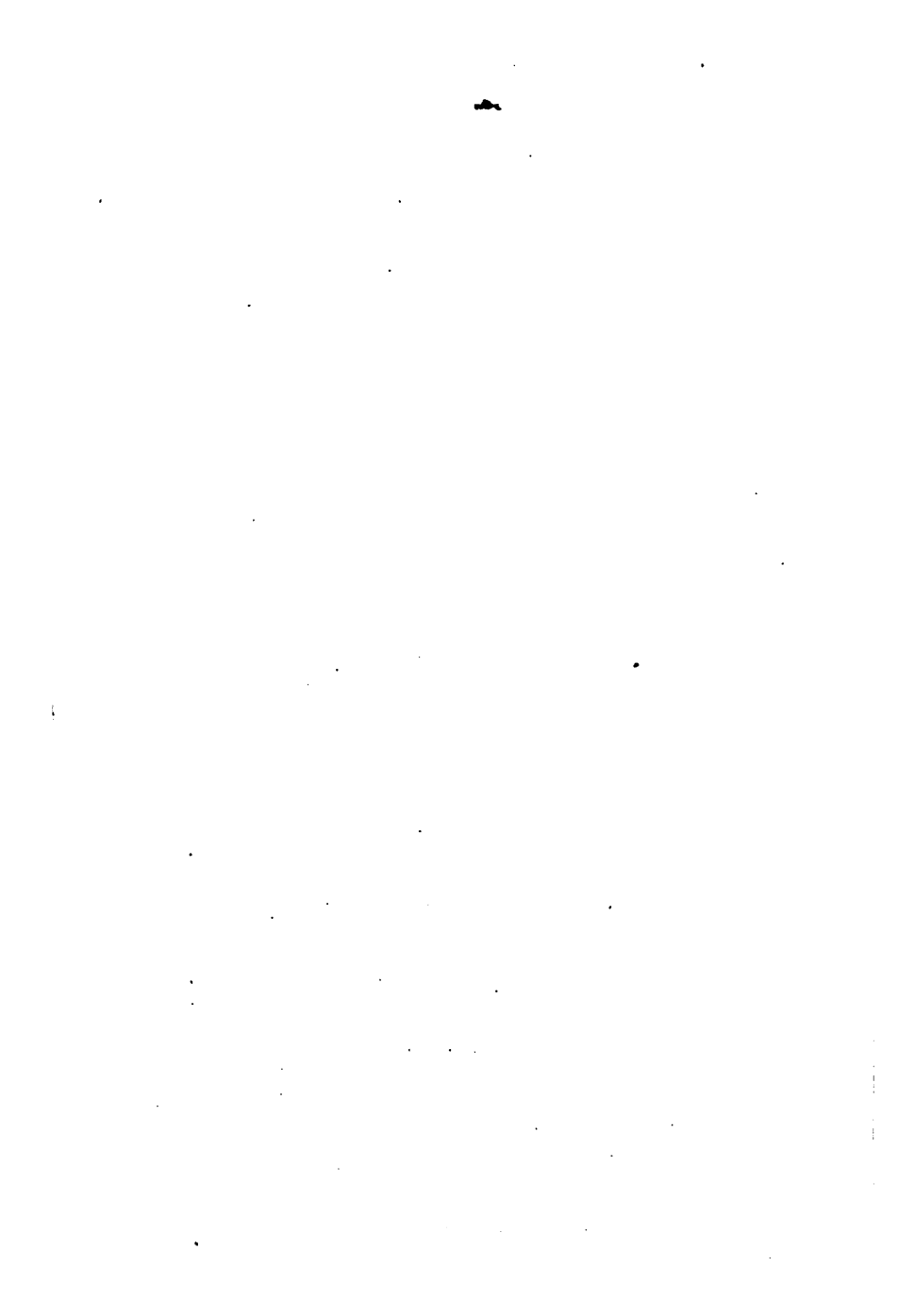
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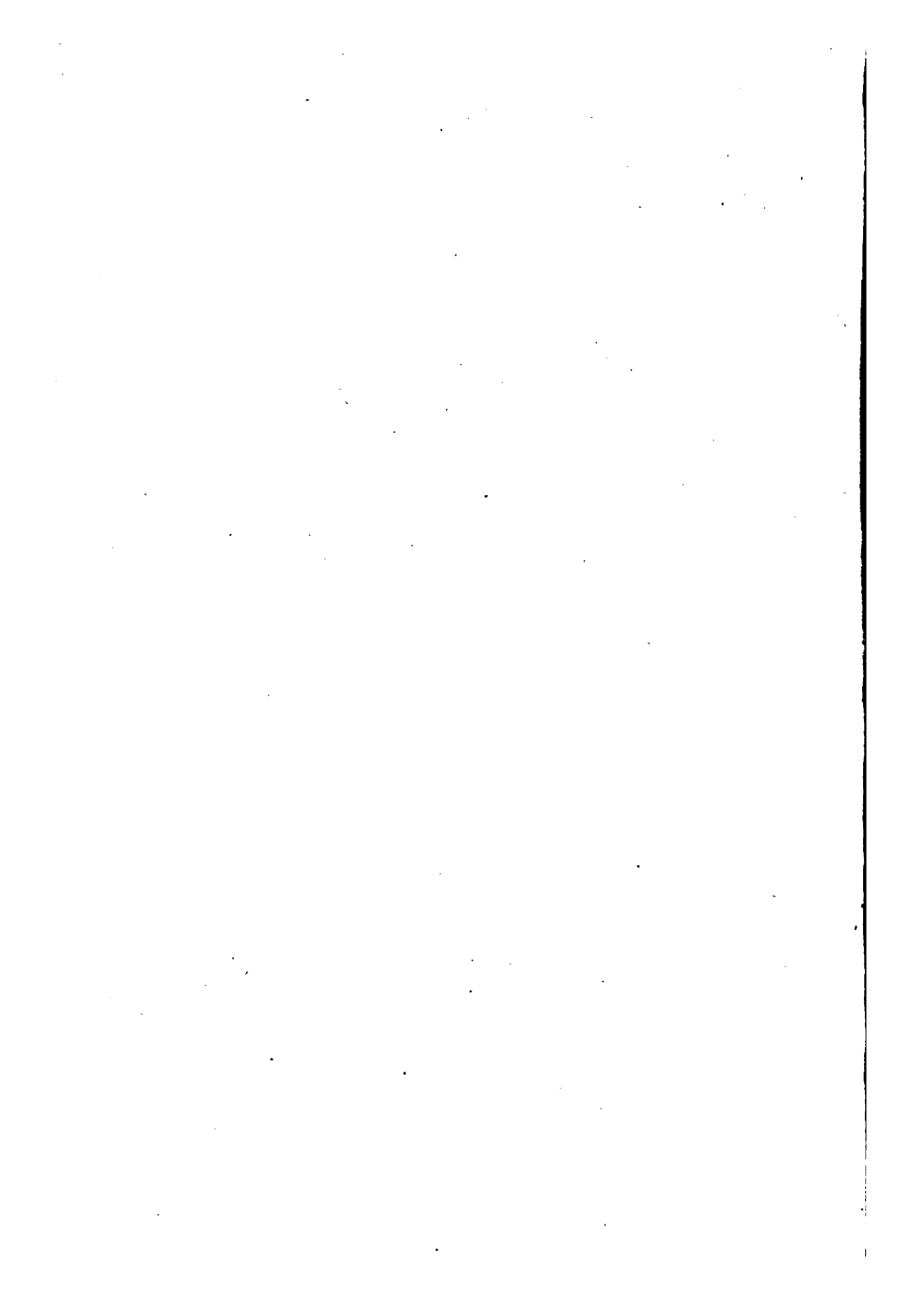
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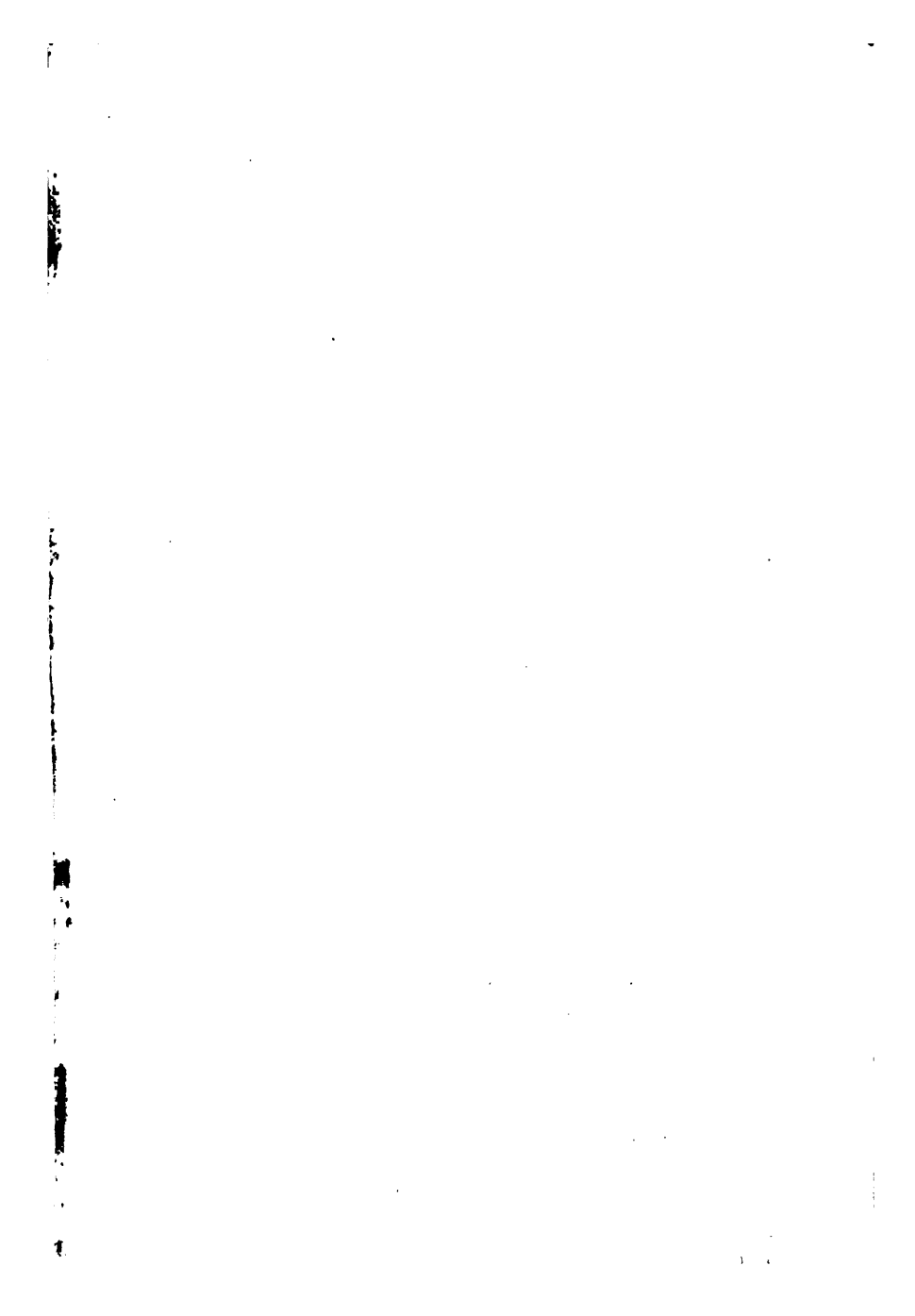




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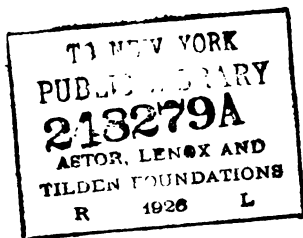
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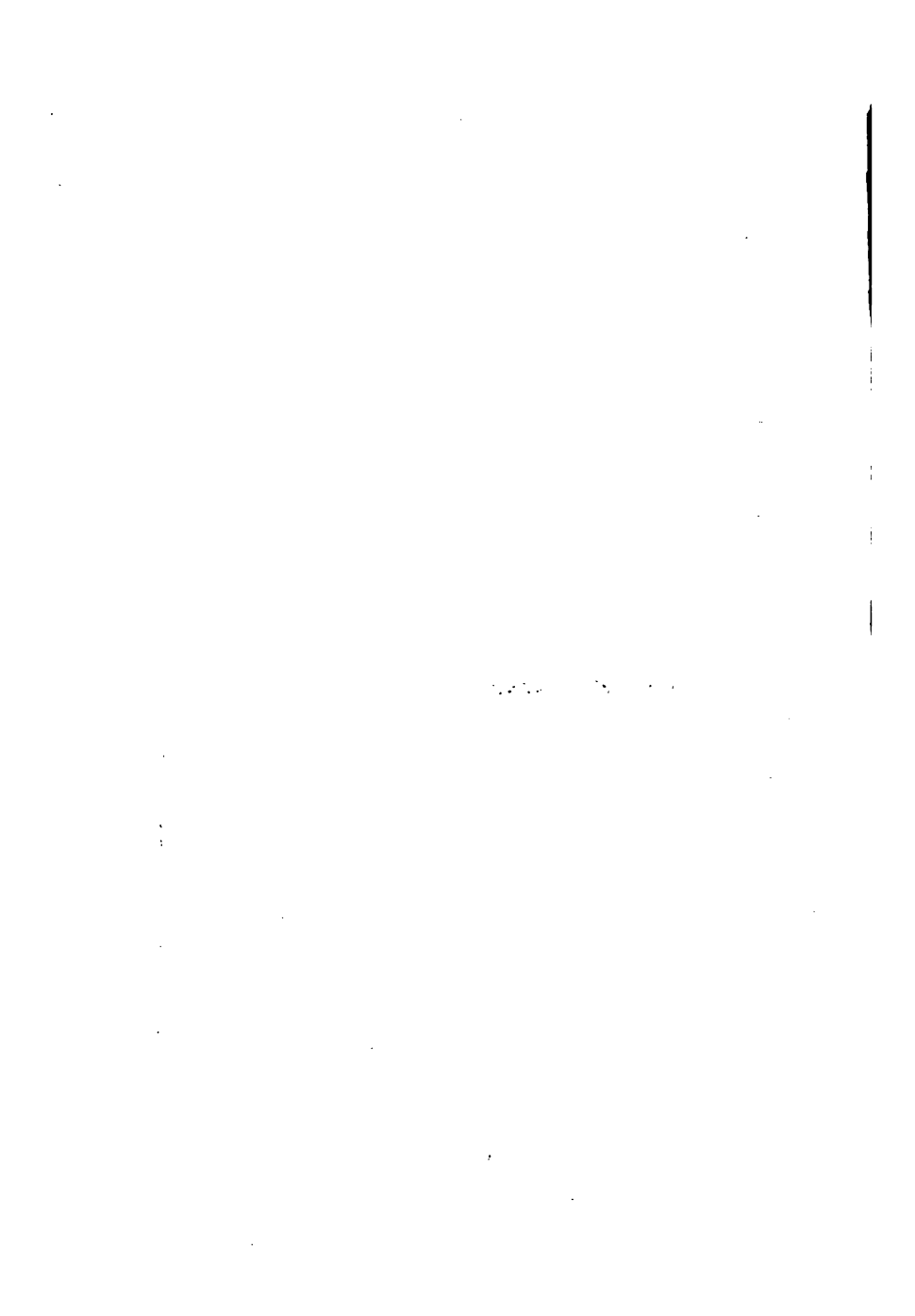
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Published May 23, 1902

Little Polly Prentiss

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I An Interrupted Story.....	1
II Getting Ready.....	10
III Miss Pomeroy Comes.....	20
IV Polly's First Journey.....	28
V At Pomeroy Oaks.....	35
VI A Trying Afternoon.....	43
VII The First Morning.....	51
VIII A Little Cook.....	58
IX Hiram.....	66
X A Delightful Caller.....	70
XI A Pleasant Plan.....	77
XII Sesame and Lilies.....	83
XIII Polly and the Minister.....	88
XIV In the Woods.....	97
XV Arctura's Story.....	104
XVI Polly's Letter.....	116
XVII In the Barn.....	126
XVIII A Dreaded Visitor.....	137
XIX Polly's Last Straw.....	151
XX Uncle Blodgett's Journey.....	162
XXI Happy at Last.....	170
XXII Polly's Party.....	180



Little Polly Prentiss

CHAPTER I

AN INTERRUPTED STORY

ALTHOUGH it was only five o'clock, and Manser Farm stood on a hill so that its windows caught the last gleam of sun on a pleasant afternoon, the garret was growing dark.

"Is it five or six days it's been raining without any stop?" inquired Mrs. Ramsdell, as she put down the lid of her horse-hair trunk and turned the key in the lock.

"It's only three days come six o'clock to-night," said Aunty Peebles in her cheery treble. "Don't you recall we were just going down to supper Monday when we heard the first drops on the tin roof? And this is only Thursday."

"Well, it seems like two weeks, that's all I've got to say about it," grumbled Mrs. Ramsdell as she rose stiffly and whisked her black alpaca skirt back and forth till every speck of dust had flown

away from it. Most of the specks settled on Grandma Manser, who sat tranquilly knitting in her corner by the south window.

"Do you know where Polly is?" suddenly demanded Mrs. Ramsdell, bending over the knitter and shouted fiercely in her ear. "Why isn't she up here this dull afternoon? The only bright thing there is in this house! What's your daughter-in law keeping her down-stairs for?"

"Polly?" repeated Grandma Manser gently. She had evidently heard only part of the gusty speech. "Polly told me she was planning to be out in the wood-shed, to help Uncle Sam Blodgett saw and split, this afternoon. She said she'd be up to recite a piece to us before supper."

"H'm. I should think 'twas high time she came, then," said Mrs. Ramsdell crossly. But after a minute her wrinkled face grew still more wrinkled with the smile that broke over it as she heard a clattering sound on the garret stairs. A second later a rosy face, about which danced a mop of short brown curls, peeped around the old bureau which hid the stairway from the group gathered near the windows.

"You're a naughty little piece, that's what you are, to stay down in the wood-shed with Sam'l

Blodgett, instead of coming up here to entertain us," cried Mrs. Ramsdell with twinkling eyes that contradicted the severity of her tone. "What have you been doing down there, I'd like to know?"

"I've been listening to war stories," said Polly Prentiss, coming out from behind the bureau. "I've been hearing about Uncle Blodgett's nephew who died down South, and 'though but nineteen years of age, displayed great bravery on the field of battle.' That's on his tombstone," said Polly, seating herself on a little stool close to Grandma Manser and reaching out her hand to pat Ebenezer, the big Maltese cat.

"Pretty doings!" grumbled Mrs. Ramsdell, but she smiled at Polly as she went over to the rocking-chair by Aunty Peebles. "We old folks have been taking things out of our trunks and putting 'em back again just to keep up heart till you came, except grandma there; she's kept to her knitting, so's not to disturb Ebenezer of his nap, I suppose."

"Ebenezer's a splendid cat, if he does like to sleep most of the time, and he looks like Mrs. Manser's old sack that the moths got into," said Polly with a laugh. "Oh, did any of you know

there was a visitor down-stairs ?—that Miss Pomeroy with the sharp eyes. Seemed as if she'd look right through me last Sunday, after church ; I guess she's pleasant, though."

"Folks can afford to be pleasant when they own property and have good clothes to their backs," said Mrs. Ramsdell. "I don't know as Hetty Pomeroy's disposition would be any better than some other folks' if 'twas tried in the furnace. Her father had a high temper, I've heard."

"She's had her trials, Miss Hetty has," said Aunty Peebles gently. "She's all alone in the world now, excepting for Arctura Green that's always worked in the family. You know she was to have had her brother's little girl to adopt, and the child died of diphtheria last fall. I understand it was a great grief to Miss Hetty."

"What's she here for in all this rain ?" questioned Mrs. Ramsdell sharply.

"Why, it's almost stopped raining," said Polly stroking Ebenezer, who stretched out one paw and curved it round her finger without opening his eyes. "She drove up to the shed to ask Uncle Blodgett to put her horse in the barn. Then I showed her away to the sitting-room, and she said she had an errand with Mrs. Manser, and I'd

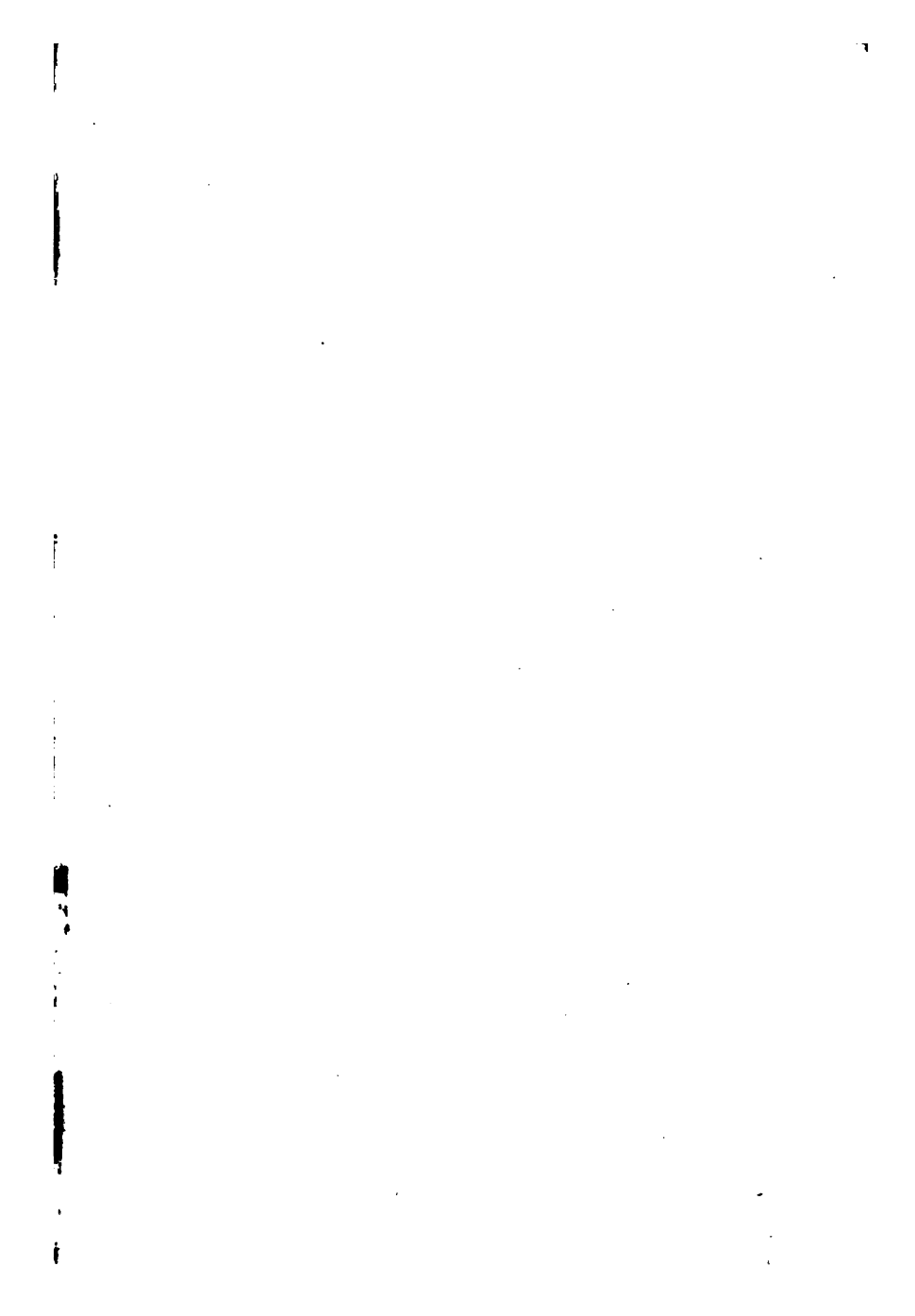
better run away soon as I'd called her. I should have, anyway," said Polly nodding at each of her old friends in turn, "for I was anxious to hurry up here, and tell you about the things Uncle Blodgett's been telling me."

Polly's quick eyes had seen a half-frightened glance exchanged between Mrs. Ramsdell and Auntie Peebles when she spoke of Miss Hetty's errand, but as neither of the old ladies seemed disposed to speak when she paused, Polly went on, thinking "it's just one of their mysteries, I suppose."

"First he recited me a poem," said Polly; "at least he really recited it to himself, 'just to keep his hand in.' I'm not very good about remembering poems, but this was by Dr. Goldsmith, Uncle Blodgett said, and it was all about a Madam Blaize. I asked him the name twice, to be sure."

"Never heard of either of 'em," said Mrs. Ramsdell. "Must both be fictitious persons. I wonder Samu'l Blodgett never recites poems to us of an evening, I must say."

"'Twas only because I happened to be there, picking up the chips," explained Polly; "and I don't know whether Dr. Goldsmith and Madam



of the garret stairs. "Mary Prentiss! Are you up there?"

"Yes'm," answered Polly as the gun dropped to the floor, and Grandma Manser, fearing she had mistaken the signal, gave a very mild sound meant for a fierce snarl. "Yes'm I'm here. Do you want me down-stairs?"

"No, I'll mount; I'm used to trouble, and they might as well hear the news at once," said the fretful voice, drawing nearer. The stairs creaked under the slow steps; the little company in the garret waited; disappointment was on Polly's face, but the old people looked sad and anxious.

Mrs. Manser's tall thin figure, and sallow, discontented face had a depressing effect on all of them, as she stood in her dark brown calico leaning against the old bureau.

"Mary Prentiss," she said solemnly, "your chance has come, thanks to the way I've brought you up and kept you clean. Miss Hester Pomeroy, of Pomeroy Oaks, is coming next Thursday morning to take you home with her for a month's trial, and if you do your best and follow all I tell you there's a likelihood Miss Pomeroy will adopt you for good and all. And now we won't have any talk or fuss over it, for I shall need every-

body's help to get you fit to go in time. We're going to have supper early to-night, so you'd better all follow me down right off, to be on hand."

Then Mrs. Manser turned and creaked slowly down the stairs, while Polly looked from the bewildered panther to the trembling edges of the wood with something very like tears in her brown eyes, and Ebenezer, after a thorough stretching of all his paws, disappeared around the bureau and hurried down to his evening meal.

CHAPTER II

GETTING READY

It seemed to Polly that no days before ever flew so fast as the ones between that rainy Thursday afternoon in April and the next Thursday morning. To be sure Polly was not accustomed to having new clothes especially made for her, and the hours spent in being fitted and re-fitted were just a waste of precious time, in her eyes.

Aunty Peebles was the best dressmaker at Manser Farm. Her fingers were old, and sometimes they trembled, but in her day she had been a famous seamstress and even now, she could hem a ruffle much better than Mrs. Manser.

"I don't know just what the reason is my work looks better than some," said Aunty Peebles flushing with delight one morning when Polly had said, "Oh what beeyu-tiful even, little bits of stitches you do make?"

"It's experience, that's all it is," said Mrs. Manser dejectedly, as she sat gathering the top

of a pink gingham sleeve, "if I'd been brought up to it instead of all the education I had that's no good to me now, I should be thankful, I'm sure."

"She'd never be thankful for anything," whispered Mrs. Ramsdell, who was ripping out bastings and constantly encountering knots which had been "machined in," and did not soothe her temper; "'taint in her, and you know it, Miss Peebles, well as I do."

"Mary," said Mrs. Manser fretfully, "don't sit there doing nothing. Let me see how you're getting on with that patchwork. My back's almost broken, and I've got chills. You go tell Father Manser to bring in some wood, and then you thread me up some needles, and fill the pin-cushion, and I've got some basting for you to do. What a looking square you've made of that last one! Well, I don't believe Miss Hetty'll keep you more than just the month, and all this sewing and these two nice gingham will go for nothing."

"I'll try to behave so she'll keep me," said Polly with a flushed face, as she hurried out to Father Manser. She returned with him after a moment. He was a thin little man, who had a kind word for everybody, but spoke in a husky tone, which Mrs. Ramsdell claimed Mrs. Manser

had "frightened him into with her education when she first married him." However that might be, Father Manser never made a statement in his wife's presence without an appealing glance toward her for approval.

"Fill up the stove," said Mrs. Manser in her most dismal tone, "and see if you can take the chill off this room, Father. I presume, though, it's in my bones and won't come out; I notice the others are warm enough, for, of course, I'd have heard complaints if they weren't. Then you might as well oil the machine and get ready to run up the seams of those aprons if your mother ever gets them done."

"I declare it riles me to see a man doing woman's work," said Mrs. Ramsdell, tugging at a vicious knot, "and doing it all hodge-podge into the bargain!"

Father Manser, all unconscious of her unfavorable criticism, filled up the stove, and then set about oiling the sewing-machine. By the time he had finished, Grandma Manser had put the last careful basting in the last apron seam, and his work was ready for him.

"Now don' nake your feet go so fast," cautioned Mrs. Manser, "and stop off carefully, so

you won't break the needles the way you did yesterday ; and do keep by the bastings. Are your specs on ? No, they aren't. You put them on, this minute."

"Yes'm," said Father Manser meekly, and when his spectacles were astride his nose he was allowed to put his feet on the treadles and start on his first seam.

"He likes to run the machine," said Aunty Peebles to Polly. "Seems as if he thought he'd got his foot in the stirrups and was riding, bold and free.

There were many such times for Father Manser during this dressmaking 'season, and he enjoyed them, though he knew how much he would miss Polly when she had gone.

In spite of hours spent in the house instead of out in the sweet spring weather, in spite of unwonted tasks, and many serious rebukes from Mrs. Manser, the days flew by instead of dragging slowly along as little Polly wished they would.

"Aunty" Peebles, who had never had a real niece ; "Grandma" Manser, who had no grandchildren ; even poor Mrs. Ramsdell, with her sharp tongue, who had "known all sorta of trials and seen better days"—all were friends to Polly, the

only friends she had in the world beside Mrs. Manser, who had brought her up (with much grumbling to be sure); kind Father Manser who sometimes gave her a stick of candy in the dark, and Uncle Sam Blodgett, with whom she had such exciting talks, the hero of the adventure the tale of which was so suddenly interrupted.

Polly's heart was sore at the thought of leaving them all; she even felt sorry that she must say good-by to poor Bob Rust, the grown man with a boy's mind, who could not be depended on to do the simplest errand.

"He's scatter-witted I know," said Polly to herself, "but I shall miss seeing Bob, because I'm used to him."

Thursday morning came all too soon. Miss Pomeroy was to come for Polly about ten o'clock. At half-past nine Polly, with anxiety written all over her rosy face, was twirling slowly around in the middle of the kitchen, while Mrs. Manser regarded her forlornly from her position in the doorway, with a hand pressed against her forehead.

"I suppose you'll have to do as you are," she said at last, with a heavy sigh. "My head aches so I'm fit for nothing, or I'd see what more I could do with that hair of yours. Is that the

very flattest you can get it, Mary? I hope you're going to remember to answer Miss Pomeroy when she says 'Mary,' better than you do me, child. It's your rightful name, and of course Polly's no kind of a name for a girl to be adopted by. Did you say you'd done the very best you could with your hair?"

"Yes'm," said Polly, twisting her hands together, locking and unlocking her fingers in evident excitement. "I wet it sopping wet, and then I patted it all down hard; but it doesn't stay down very well, I'm afraid."

Polly was right; in spots her hair was still damp and sleek on her little head, but around these satisfactory spots her short curls rose and danced defiance to brush and water.

"Oh, Ebenezer, I wish I had fur like yours, instead of hair!" cried Polly, but Ebenezer only blinked at her and retired hastily behind the stove as if he feared she might attempt an exchange of head-covering.

"Well," said Mrs. Manser, dropping into a rocking-chair and clasping her head with both hands, "all I've got to say is, you must do the best you can by Miss Pomeroy and all of us. You know just how much depends on Miss Pome-

roy's adopting you. You know what it'll mean to Father Manser, and me and the old folks that I board for almost nothing, to keep them off the town, if you are adopted. And Grandma—you're always saying you're so fond of her—you'd like her to have one of those new hearing apparatuses, I should suppose."

"Oh, yes'm," said Polly eagerly, "I do love Grandma Manser so, and I want her to have the ap-apyoratus. Will it cost a great deal?"

"I don't just know," said Mrs. Manser; "but they say Miss Pomeroy's going to give five hundred dollars to whatever institution or place in which she finds the child she keeps, and, a present of money to the folks that have brought her up. She didn't mention it to me, but the butcher told me yesterday 'twas known all about, and she's been sent for to several places to see children. But she never took a fancy to one till she saw you in church with me. She thinks you've got a look about the eyes that's like Eleanor, that was her brother's little girl who died last fall. I guess you're about as different from her as a child could be, every other way."

"I suppose Eleanor was an awful good, quiet little girl, wasn't she?" asked Polly timidly.

"Her name sounds kind of still. I don't believe she ever tore her clothes, did she?"

"I don't suppose another such good child ever lived, according to Miss Hetty's ideas," said Mrs. Manser dismally. "She'd never been here in town since she was a baby, and the mother's folks brought her and Bobby, the twin, one summer to Pomeroy Oaks. As I've told you, both parents died, leastways they were destroyed in an accident, when the twins were less than a year old."

"And Bobby lives with his grandpa and grandma now," said Polly with the air of reciting an oft-repeated lesson, "and folks say that saw him when he was here last winter that he just sits and reads all the time; he doesn't care for play or being outdoors much; and he never makes a speck of dirt or a mite of noise! And when somebody said what a good child he was, Miss Hetty Pomeroy, she said, 'Wait till you see Eleanor!' So anybody can tell what she must have been," concluded poor little Polly with a gasping breath.

"And so of course," said Mrs. Manser fixing a forlorn gaze on the little figure in stiffly starched pink gingham, "if you run wild out doors picking flowers, and chasing around after the live

stock and wasting time with the birds the way you've been allowed to do here, you'll lose your chance, that's all. You came of good folks ; your mother was my third cousin and your father was a well-meaning man, though he wasn't forehanded, and always enjoyed poor health. I've brought you up the best I could for seven years, but I expect nothing but what Miss Hetty'll send you back when the month's up."

"I'll try real hard not to lose the chance," said Polly earnestly. Her eyes shone with an odd mixture of determination and fright ; there was, moreover, a decided suggestion of tears, but Mrs. Manser with her head in her hands again, failed to notice it.

"It isn't to be supposed you can take that Eleanor's place," she groaned. "You're willing to fetch and carry, and you've got a fair disposition, but you do hate to stay still. Your father was like that—one of these restless folks."

Polly's face was overcast with doubt and trouble, but she stood her ground. "I'll be just as like Eleanor as ever I can," she said slowly. "If I could only ask Miss Pomeroy just what Eleanor would have done every day, I guess I could do the same. But you've told me I mustn't speak

about Eleanor, because Miss Pomeroy doesn't want anybody to." Polly looked wistfully at Mrs. Manser's bowed head.

"That makes it harder," said Polly, when there was no answer to this half question save another groan, "but I guess I can manage some way." Her face looked as nearly stern as was possible for such a combination of soft curves and dimples, but her eyes were misty.

Through the open door the soft air of the April morning blew in to her, and her little body thrilled with the love of the spring, and living, growing, outdoor friends. But if on her behaviour depended the bestowal of Miss Hetty's princely sum, Manser Farm should have it. In all the ten years of Polly's life she had never before heard of such a large amount of money, except in arithmetic examples which, as everybody knows, deal with all things in a bold way, unhampered by probability.

With a final groan Mrs. Manser rose and went to the door. Then she turned quickly to Polly.

"Here comes Miss Hetty now, up the road," she said. "Go and make your good-bys to the folks, child, and put on your hat and jacket and then get your bag, so as not to keep her waiting, she may be in a hurry."

CHAPTER III

MISS POMEROY COMES

POLLY ran out of the room, and Mrs. Manser hurried through the house to open the front door ; she stepped out to the wagon to greet Miss Pomeroy, and stood with the breeze fluttering her scanty front locks till Polly reappeared.

"I don't know as she'll be what you want, at all," said Mrs. Manser blinking up at the grave, kind face above her, for the sun shone in her eyes. "I'll leave you to find out what sort of a child she is, as I told you the other day, for nobody can tell what will suit anybody else. I've tried to bring her up well, but of course she hasn't had advantages, though she's pretty bright in school, her teacher says."

"I'm glad it's vacation time," said Miss Pomeroy cheerily, "Mary and I will have so much better chance to get acquainted with each other, and become friends whether she stays with me always or not. Is she pleased to go, Mrs. Manser?"

"I guess she realizes what a great chance 'tis for her, and how good you are," said Mrs. Manser avoiding the direct gaze of the keen gray eyes. She began to wish she had left unsaid a few things, with which she had charged Polly's mind. "Of course 'tisn't as if she had the sense of a grown person," she added somewhat vaguely.

"I don't know about that," laughed Miss Pomeroy, "it seems to me that little people have a wonderful amount of sense sometimes."

"Well, I don't know," said Mrs. Manser dubiously, "perhaps they have."

Meanwhile Polly had run out to the shed where the old people were waiting to say good-by to her. They had been marshalled into a line by Uncle Sam Blodgett so that Polly might be hugged and kissed by each in turn, without loss of time; but the line wavered and broke as the little figure they all loved to see came flying in at the door. Poor Bob Rust, from his humble stand at the rear, gave a strange, sorrowful cry and turned to go out of the shed.

"Here, Bob," called Polly peremptorily, "I'll kiss you first of all, on your forehead because I don't like all your whiskers, you know,"

and the man stopped for his good-by and then ran, stumbling, out of the shed and away to the cow pasture.

"I said good-by to the cows and all the hens and the pigs when I first got up," said Polly, turning to her friends; "and I gave Prince some oats and said good-by to him right after breakfast. Now Uncle Blodgett, it's your turn."

The old man swung her quickly up into his arms and gave her a hearty kiss.

"Here," he said as he set her down, "you take this bunch o' slippery elm to keep me in mind, and you take this knife. One blade's all right, and 'twould be an extra fine article if the other blade was fixed up a bit."

"Oh, thank you," said Polly fervently, as she slipped her two presents into her petticoat pocket, "you're just as good as you can be. Perhaps I shall come back here to stay, but anyway Miss Pomeroy would let me come to see you all, sometimes, I'm sure."

"I reckon you'll never come back here," muttered Uncle Blodgett to the chopping block, "not to stay, if that Pomeroy woman has got eyes and a heart."

Mrs. Ramsdell pressed Polly fiercely to her

breast and then let her go, after a searching look into the brown eyes.

"There, that's over with," she said firmly. "One more thing gone, along with all the rest."

"But I shan't forget you," faltered Polly whose eyes were getting very misty indeed.

"Of course you won't, dear child," quavered Auntie Peebles as she folded Polly in her arms, and as she released the little girl she pressed a tiny pin-cushion into her hand, which speedily found a hiding-place with the slippery elm and the bladeless knife.

Last of all came Grandma Manser who smoothed Polly's curls with her trembling hands and could hardly bear to say good-by at all.

"If you get adopted, my lamb," she whispered in Polly's ear, "daughter Sarah says it's likely she can buy me something to hear with, and Uncle Sam Blodgett's promised to read to us now you're going. But if you aren't happy at Miss Hetty's, dear, you come back, and nobody will be better pleased than I to see you; 'twill joy me more than an ear-trumpet!"

Polly swallowed hard, and dashed something from her eyes as she ran into the house. She said a hasty good-by to Father Manser, who was

washing his hands at the kitchen sink for the third time since breakfast, and hurried out of doors with the big enamel cloth bag which contained her wardrobe.

She curtseyed to Miss Pomeroy, and gave a faint "good morning, ma'am" in response to the cheery salutation from her new friend. Mrs. Manser gave her a peck on the lips and a forlorn "Good-by, child, and be as little trouble as you can to Miss Pomeroy," and then Polly climbed into the wagon.

In another minute the wagon was rolling quickly down the road, the chorus of good-bys from old familiar voices had hushed into silence, and Polly, stealing a glance at the gray eyes so far above the brim of her Sunday hat, felt that old things had passed away, and a new, strange life stretched out before her.

"Let me see, Mary, you are ten years old, aren't you? When does your birthday come?" Miss Hetty asked suddenly, when they had gone a little way down the hill toward the village. The voice was kind and friendly, but the unwonted "Mary" which she must expect always to hear now, gave Polly a homesick twinge.

"It's come," she answered, glancing timidly

up at Miss Hetty ; " I had my birthday two weeks ago, and I was ten—if you please," added the little girl hastily.

" I guess I was just as polite as Eleanor that time," she thought, and the idea that she had made a fair start cheered Polly so that she smiled confidingly at Miss Pomeroy who smiled at her in return.

" You don't look as old as that," she said kindly, but her voice had a sober sound at which Polly took alarm.

" Yes'm, I'm small for my age," she said slowly, " but I'm real strong, I've never been sick, not one single day." And then she thought, " oh dear, probably Eleanor was tall ! I'm going to see if I can't stretch myself out the way Ebenezer did when he was little. I can lie down on the floor in my room and reach my arms and legs as far as they'll go—what ma'am ? " said Polly quickly as she realized that Miss Pomeroy was speaking.

" I was saying that I suppose you're accustomed to playing out of doors a good deal," said Miss Hetty a little sharply, " for you have such rosy cheeks. What are you thinking about, my dear ? "

"I was thinking about Ebenezer for one thing," said Polly truthfully. "Yes'm my cheeks are always pretty red." Then she was seized with dismay, probably Eleanor's cheeks were white, like snowdrops. "They aren't quite so red when I'm in the house," she ventured bravely, "and of course I shall be in the house a great deal now I'm getting on in years."

Polly felt that this phrase, borrowed from Mrs. Manser's stock, was most happily chosen. Miss Hetty made an inarticulate sound, and touched up her little brown mare, but all she said was "Who is Ebenezer?"

"Ebenezer is Mrs. Manser's cat," said Polly, glad to be on safe ground, "and he knows a great deal, Father Manser says. He is nearly as old as I am, and he has caught forty-three rats to Uncle Blodgett's certain sure knowledge, and nobody knows how many more. He has eaten them, too," said Polly gravely, "though I don't see how he could ever in this world, do you?"

"They wouldn't be to my taste," said Miss Pomeroy briskly. "Who is Uncle Sam Blodgett? I mean, is he a relation of yours?"

"Oh no, ma'am, he isn't any relation to anybody," said Polly; "his kith and kin have all

died, he says, and he is a lonely old hulk – that's what he told me he was," she added, seeing a look that might be disapproval on Miss Hetty's face. "He's had adventures by land and sea and suffered far and near, and it's a tame thing for him to saw and split now that his days are numbered."

"Mercy on us!" ejaculated Miss Pomeroy. "Where did you ever get such a memory, child?"

"From—from my father, Mrs. Manser said," faltered Polly. Here was a new cause of anxiety; evidently Eleanor's memory had been quite different from hers. Polly looked steadily before her, and set her little mouth firmly. "Perhaps Arctura Green that they've spoken of can tell me about Eleanor's memory," she thought suddenly; "maybe I can ask her about a good many things."

Just then Daisy, the pretty brown mare, turned the curve at the foot of the long hill, and they were in the main street of Mapleton.

CHAPTER IV

POLLY'S FIRST JOURNEY

"Now I have some errands to do," said Miss Pomeroy, "perhaps you'd like to get out of the wagon as Burcham's and see the new toys."

"No, ma'am, thank you, I will stay here and hold the horse," said Polly, and after a keen look at her, Miss Pomeroy drove to the butcher's shop and alighted leaving Daisy in her charge.

"I guess that is what Eleanor would have said," remarked Polly in a low, confidential tone to the horse, as she carefully flicked an early fly from Daisy's back; "and truly I don't care a bit about seeing dolls or anything to-day. Of course I mustn't tell stories, trying to be like Eleanor; I've just got to stop wanting to do things, so that I can tell the truth."

As she faced this tremendous task Polly sat so still and erect that she looked like a stern little sentinel, and her motionless figure attracted the attention of a number of people whom she did not see. In a few moments Miss Pomeroy came out of

the butcher's and went across the road to the post-office. The butcher brought out a package in brown paper and stowed it carefully in at the back of the wagon. Then he stepped around to pat Daisy and speak to Polly. He was a red-faced, hearty man who had lost two front teeth and talked with a slight lisp. He and Polly had always been on excellent terms.

"How d'ye do, Polly," he said reaching up his unoccupied hand to grasp the little girl's, "this is the day you start in to live with Miss Pomeroy? Well, you're going to have a fine home, and she's an extra good woman, when you get used to her being a mite quick and up-and-coming."

"Mr. Boggs," said Polly anxiously, "you know I'm Mary Prentiss now. You mustn't please call me by my old name any more—not unless Miss Pomeroy decides not to adopt me. I don't suppose you ever saw Eleanor, Miss Pomeroy's niece that died? No, of course you couldn't have."

"I saw her when she came here, a year ago," said Mr. Boggs as he turned to greet a customer; "just like most children of that age, she looked, for all I could see; I reckon her qualities weren't what you could call developed."

then. Well, good day to you, Miss Mary Prentiss, and the best of luck," he said with a laugh and a low bow as he gave Polly's hand a final shake.

Just then Miss Pomeroy came across the road with her hands full of papers and letters, and with a little white bag which she put in Polly's lap as she took her seat. The bag had a deliciously lumpy feeling, and Polly's mind leaped to gum-drops in an instant.

"Open it, and let us see what they are like," said Miss Pomeroy as she gathered up the reins which had slackened in Polly's hands during the interview with Mr Boggs. "Chocolate creams and gum-drops; I suspect you'll like the chocolates best, Mary, but I'm very fond of gum-drops, so I'll take one of those; one piece of candy is all I allow myself in a day, so you may carry off the bag to your own room when we get there, to keep me from being tempted."

Polly took one bite of a big chocolate drop, after Miss Pomeroy had been served to her taste, and then she gave a little sigh of delight.

"I never tasted a chocolate cream before," she said slowly, "I don't suppose there's anything else so nice to eat in all the world, is there? I wish

Aunty Peebles had some of these. I shall save her half, that is, if you're willing," she added hastily.

"I'm afraid they'll be pretty hard and dry before you see Aunty Peebles again," said Miss Pomeroy, and Polly's heart sank, in spite of the delicious taste in her mouth.

"I don't expect she's going to let me see Manser Farm again, till next Christmas, probably, if she adopts me," thought Polly. "Of course candy is good for 'most a year if you keep it carefully, but it does begin to get a little hard, I know, because those two peppermints Father Manser gave me yesterday were the last of the ones he bought for Thanksgiving, and they were just a little bit hard, though of course they were nice."

"Maybe I could give some of them to the butcher to take to Aunty Peebles, if—if he comes to Pomeroy Oaks," ventured Polly after a short silence, during which Daisy was trotting along the road, out of the village, past the square white church with its tall steeple, past the tinsmith's shop, on toward the meadows beyond which lay Polly's undiscovered country.

"He comes twice a week," said Miss Pomeroy, "but wouldn't you like to send Aunty Pee-

bles a little box of fresh candy by mail, some day, to surprise her? You could put it in the post-office and Mr. Manser would get it when he goes for the mail, and take it to her."

"Oh," said Polly, her eyes brimming over with gratitude, "oh, aren't you good! Why, Aunty Peebles hasn't ever had anything from the post-office excepting once a year her second cousin from way out West sends her a paper with the list of deaths in the town where she lives, and sometimes there's an ink mark to show it's been a friend of her second cousin's family; but" said Polly shaking her head, "it 'most always made Aunty Peebles cry when it came, and I believe she would rather not have had it."

"I should say not, indeed," assented Miss Pomeroy; "just hear that bird, Mary! he's telling cheerful news, isn't he?"

Polly hugged herself with sudden joy. Miss Pomeroy evidently liked birds, or she would never have spoken in that way. "Probably she'll leave the windows open, so I can hear them when I'm reading and sewing and doing quiet things, like Eleanor," she thought happily, but all she said was, "Oh, yes'm isn't he glad spring has come, don't you believe?"

"I believe he is, my dear," said Miss Pomeroy, "and now if you look ahead, you can see through the trees the roof of the house where you are going to live for a little while at any rate."

"For always," said Polly firmly to herself. "Miss Pomeroy's as good as she can be, and there's Grandma Manser's ear trumpet, and Mrs. Manser's poor health, and all I've got to do is to learn to like to sew and read better than to play, and to stay in the house and be quiet instead of running wild out-doors. That isn't much," said Polly scornfully to herself, "for a great girl like me."

Past the rich meadows through which ran the little brook that joined Ashdon River, over the wooden bridge that rumbled under her feet, along the brook road beneath the arching willows, up the easy hill, and into the avenue of stately oaks that gave Miss Pomeroy's home its name trotted Daisy carrying her mistress with the grave, kind eyes and little eager-faced Polly. The child gazed with awe and excitement at the flying panorama, and gave quick, short breaths as the pretty mare made a skilful turn and stopped before a porch over which was trained an old grape vine; on the porch stood Arctura Green, Miss Pomeroy's faithful helper, and at the foot of the steps

Hiram, Aretura's brother, waited to take Daisy, who rubbed her nose against his rough hand and gave a little whinny of pleasure before she crunched the lump of sugar which Hiram slipped into her mouth.

"Here we are, my dear," said Miss Pomeroy briskly, and Polly, feeling as if she were sound asleep and wide awake all together, jumped out of the wagon.

CHAPTER V

AT POMEROY OAKS

"THIS is little Mary Prentiss," said Miss Pomeroy to Arctura Green, who stood beaming down on Polly.

"Well, I'm glad enough to see you," said Arctura heartily, reaching out her long arm and drawing the little girl close to her side; "something young is just what we need here; we're all growing old, Miss Hetty, and Hiram and I, and Daisy and the cows and all hands; we've got a couple of kittens, to be sure, but they're always busy about their own affairs and don't talk much, so they're no great company."

"Why, Arctura, I don't know when I've heard you make such a long speech," said Miss Pomeroy, "I hope you have something good for dinner, for Mary and I have had a long drive and a great deal of excitement, and we shall be hungry pretty soon."

"It's only just turned half-past eleven," said Arctura, releasing Polly after a good squeeze

against her big checked apron, "so there'll be an hour to wait. Where's the little girl's baggage, Miss Hetty?"

"It's there in the back of the wagon," said Miss Pomeroy, "a big black bag."

"If you please, I can carry it, Miss Arctura," said Polly, stepping forward to take the bag; "I'm real strong."

"I want to know," said Arctura placidly. "Well, considering how many times as big as you are I am, supposing you let me lug it upstairs for you just this once; I shouldn't know I was lifting more'n a feather's weight," and she swung the bag jauntily as she marched into the house after Miss Pomeroy, gently pushing the little girl before her.

Hiram stood looking into the house for a moment! his mouth had fallen open as was its wont in times of meditation. Hiram had what his sister frankly called a "draughty countenance," with a large-nostrilled nose, big, prominent ears, and bulging eyes, but the same spirit of good-nature that illumined Arctura's face shone from her brother's.

"She's a neat little piece," remarked Hiram to Daisy as he headed her for the barn, "a neat

little piece if ever I saw one, but she looks a mite scared, seems's if. This is a kind of a quiet place for a young one to be set down, no mistake, and there ain't any passing to speak of. Children like to see things a-going, even if they're a-going by, seems's if. She gave me a real pretty smile, say what you've a mind to," he insisted, as if Daisy had expressed violent remonstrance.

The side porch led into a small square hall; opposite the porch door was one which Aretura opened, and Polly saw that it was at the foot of a flight of stairs. Aretura and the black enamel cloth bag vanished from sight as the door closed. In the hall stood a hat-tree with curved mahogany branches tipped with shining brass.

"Now, I hang my every-day coat and hat here," said Miss Pomeroy, suiting the action to the word, "and you'd better do the same. What's the matter, child?" she asked at the sight of Polly's face.

"These—these are not my every-day hat and jacket, Miss Pomeroy, if you please," said Polly. "My every-day jacket is a shawl, and my every-day hat is a sunbonnet, sometimes, and sometimes it isn't—it hasn't been anything. These are my Sunday best, and they are used to lying in a

drawer on account of the dust—though I don't believe there's one speck of dust here," she added politely.

"Arctura would be pleased to hear that," said Miss Pomeroy. "I think we may venture to leave the Sunday hat and coat here until after dinner. When you go up-stairs you will find a drawer in which you can put them, I'm sure."

Then Miss Hetty led the way through a door at the left of the hall into a big, comfortable room, the walls of which were lined with book-cases. There was a bow-window, around which ran a cushioned seat; there were lounging chairs and rocking chairs, and a long sofa; a great round mahogany table covered with books and papers; and, best of all, a fire-place with a bright fire burning under the black pot which hung on the iron crane; and guarding the fire were two soldierly figures with stern profiles.

"Those were my great-great-grandfather's and-irons," said Miss Pomeroy as she watched Polly's eyes. "Suppose you sit down by the fire and get warmed through, for there was a little chill in the air, after all; and you might take a book to amuse yourself, I have to be busy with something for a while. Would you—I suppose you wouldn't

care to look at the newspaper?" questioned Miss Pomeroy doubtfully. "The child looks so absurdly young," she thought, "and yet she talks as if she were fifty."

"No, thank you," said Polly, "I will just look at the fire and the books." So Miss Pomeroy opened another door that led into the great front hall, and went out of the room. She left the door open, and Polly could hear a solemn ticking. She tiptoed to the door, and looking out into the hall saw a tall clock with a great white face, above which there was a silvery moon in her last quarter. Polly looked at the slowly swinging pendulum with shining eyes.

"That must be Mrs. Ramsdell's clock," she said softly. "I mean her father's. She described it just that way, and she said it's like was never seen in these parts; no, it was those parts," said Polly, correcting herself, "for it was way off in Connecticut. Well, then, there must have been two made alike, and Mrs. Ramsdell never knew it; I guess I won't tell her, for she might be sorry."

Polly stood a moment in the doorway; she could hear the sound of Miss Pomeroy's voice in some distant part of the house. She tiptoed back

into the library ; the carpet was so thick and soft that Polly knelt down and rubbed it gently with her little hand ; then she put her head down and pressed her cheek against the faded roses.

“ It feels like Ebenezer’s fur,” said Polly. “ I wonder if Ebenezer will miss me.”

Polly sat still for a moment with wistful eyes, and then hastily scrambled to her feet as the door into the side hall opened part-way and Arctura stuck her head in.

“ Here,” she said dropping a struggling heap on the floor, “ I thought maybe you’d like to see these two little creatures ; I call ’em Snip and Snap, and I’ve had a chase to find ’em for you. There’s nothing they can break in the library, so Miss Hetty let’s ’em run wild once in a while. I’ll just shut that other door.”

Arctura marched across the floor, and shut the door into the front hall ; then she marched back toward her own quarters. “ If I were in your place,” she said looking at the kittens instead of at Polly, “ I wouldn’t make a practice of sitting on the floor. I don’t know as it’s any harm really, but a chair looks better for little girls.”

“ Yes’m,” said Polly with scarlet cheeks, as Arctura vanished with a good-humored smile.

"I expect she thought I was turning somersaults maybe," said Polly to the kittens, "oh dear!"

But the kittens were quite undisturbed by Arctura's remarks. As Polly stood still for a moment, they began an acrobatic performance which always gave them keen enjoyment. Snip made a clutch for the hem of Polly's skirt in front at the same instant that Snap sprang upon her from the rear. They secured a good hold on the pink gingham, and clambered up to Polly's shoulder as fast as they could go. There they met and shifted positions with considerable scratching of their sharp little claws, and descended, Snap in front, and Snip at the back, tumbling around Polly's feet, and then scampering away from each other sidewise with arched backs and distended tails.

"Oh, you little cunnings!" cried Polly, forgetting all her troubles in a minute. To the window-seats flew Snip and Snap, and there they swung back and forth on the stout curtain cords, and made dashes at each other; then they were off to the seat of an old leather-covered chair. Snip mounted to the top of the back and patted Snap on the head with a paw whose claws were politely sheathed, as often as he started to spring to his

brother's side. Over and under chairs and tables they went, and Polly, full of delight, followed them, catching up one or the other whenever she could.

At last the kittens grew tired of play, and when Miss Hetty opened the library door they were comfortably seated on Polly's shoulders, and there was a sound in the room as of two contented little mill-wheels.

CHAPTER VI

A TRYING AFTERNOON

“So you like your new friends, my dear,” said Miss Hetty. “They must be banished to the shed now for their dinner while you and I eat ours. Do you hear Arctura’s signal to us?”

There came a sound unlike anything Polly had ever heard ; it was not exactly a bell ; she couldn’t imagine what it was. Miss Hetty held out her hand with a smile and Polly, still with the kittens on her shoulders, was led out of the library across the porch hall to a big sunny dining-room. On the table, at Miss Hetty’s place, stood a strange thing with three bronze cups upside down, a little one highest up, one somewhat larger under it, and one still larger at the bottom ; at least that was the way it looked to Polly.

Arctura stood close to it with a little stick in her hand ; she struck the bronze cups as Polly looked at her, and again the musical sound was heard.

"There, I reckoned you'd never heard anything like that!" said Arctura as she beamed on Polly, and then took the kittens from the little girl's shoulders. "That's a heathen invention, called a gong, brought to Miss Pomeroy by her Uncle Pete. I hope you'll relish your food, I've got no time to sit down now," said Arctura, and bearing Snip and Snap in her arms, she marched out of a doorway through which there was a glimpse of the kitchen.

Arctura Green had never sat at the table with Miss Pomeroy in all the years of her faithful service, but it was understood to be purely a matter of choice on her part, and a few words were spoken now and then to make this state of affairs clear to any chance visitor.

Polly ate her steak and potato and fresh bread and butter, sitting opposite Miss Pomeroy, and only speaking in answer to questions. She looked at the spotless white table-cloth with its rose and fern pattern, at the shining glass tumblers, and the big glass water-bottle, at the fat silver tea-pot and sugar-bowl, and the slender spoons and forks, at the knives, with mother-of-pearl handles, at the white plates with dull blue figures that matched those on the platters and

at the big bread-plate with its gold rim. Then she looked at the buffet on which there were all sorts of shining things.

"It is because everything is so wonderful in the house that they like to stay here better than out-doors," thought Polly, but in spite of everything her eyes turned wistfully to the window. The sunshine flickered and danced among the branches of the Pomeroy oaks, and Polly gave a half sigh as she looked at it.

"Don't you like your pudding, my dear?" asked Miss Hetty, and the little girl turned quickly to her dinner again.

After dinner she followed Miss Pomeroy up the broad, shallow front stairs to the pretty room which had been prepared for her. It had a white bed, a white bureau, a white wash-stand, two little straight-backed white chairs, and a white rocking-chair. A pink stripe ran through the white near the edges of all these pieces of furniture, and Polly thought it was the most beautiful bedroom that could possibly be imagined.

"And here is your closet," said Miss Hetty, as she opened a door, and showed what seemed to Polly like a good-sized room, with shelves

and hooks. On the lowest shelf sat the big black enamel cloth bag, looking old and forlorn.

"Now you'd better take out your things and put them away in the closet and the bureau, Mary," said Miss Hetty, and perhaps you'd like to lie down and rest awhile. I am going to take my nap now. When you wish to go downstairs you may, but I wouldn't run out to-day, for the ground is so damp. I dare say you'll find plenty to amuse you in the house, and you are free to go anywhere. I'm sure I can trust such a careful, quiet little girl as you are."

When the door that led into Miss Pomeroy's room across the hall was fairly shut Polly executed a silent dance on the soft gray and pink carpet.

"I guess Mrs. Manser'd think I was doing pretty well," said Polly, thrilling with pride. "I never was called 'quiet' or 'careful' before. She'd hardly believe it. I must be growing like Eleanor pretty fast. As soon as I've put away my things I shall lie right down on that bed. I wonder how long I ought to stay on it. I suppose most probably Eleanor would stay till she heard her aunt getting up; that's what I'll

do. Mrs. Manser said most likely Miss Pomeroy would give me tests of all sorts I shall lie on that bed till I hear Miss Pomeroy if it's—two hours," said Polly firmly, mentioning the longest space of time which she could conceive might be spent in sleeping by daylight.

Then Polly took the big bag out of the closet and proceeded to unpack it. There was her other new gingham frock on top of everything else ; it had blue and white stripes, and was very pretty, Polly thought as she laid it carefully away in the lowest of the four bureau drawers. Then came her little brown cashmere frock, made over from one which had done service for six years as Mrs. Manser's Sunday gown ; it was Polly's Sunday best now, very brave with a little red piping around the neck and sleeves, and at the head of the ruffle. This Polly hung in the closet.

In the closet too went a very old and much-mended red frock which was always nearly hidden by long-sleeved and high-necked aprons. There were four of these, and two more new ones without sleeves. Polly was so small that there had been plenty of room in the big bag for all these things and for the little store of underclothes

which went into the third drawer. The aprons had the second drawer to themselves and in the top drawer there were Polly's small handkerchiefs and one pair of little white cotton gloves, freshly washed.

Polly took the bag back to the closet after removing the very last thing, her work-basket which she put on the bureau, beside the fat pincushion. Looking at this cushion reminded her of hidden treasures and diving into her petticoat pocket she brought forth Aunty Peebles's gift, and then the knife ; these Polly placed on a table, which stood near one of the two windows. Then, after looking about the room for a moment with an air of much satisfaction, Polly slipped off her little shoes, and folding her shawl about her shoulders after the manner of Mrs. Ramsdell when ready for a nap, she turned back the white quilt, and climbing sedately up on the bed, laid her head on the pillow and clasped her little hands.

"I don't feel sleepy," said Polly, "but that doesn't make any difference. I've got plenty of things to think of. Perhaps Eleanor didn't always go to sleep. There are all those leaks in the poor farm—they'll get mended if I'm adopted.

And this is a beautiful place, and I'm not going to be lonesome, a great girl like me, if 'tis pretty still here. I wonder what Miss Arctura Green is doing ; and those kitties, I wonder where they are."

An hour or so later Miss Hetty held a consultation with Arctura in the kitchen.

"I came down the back way so I should not wake that child," said Miss Pomeroy. "She hasn't stirred since she lay down, I verily believe. Do you think it's natural for a little girl of her age to sleep nearly two hours at this time of day?"

"Why, you see we don't either of us know much about children," said Arctura meditatively. "She looks pretty strong, but I notice her appetite's nothing extra, and probably she's all excited up, and tired out. Seems to me, though, if she don't stir by the end of another half hour I should kind of make a noise in my room if I was in your place, and wake her up gradual."

At the end of another half hour Miss Pomeroy opened and shut a window in her room with vigor, and when she stepped across the hall to Polly's room, the little girl was putting on her shoes.

"Well, well," said Miss Pomeroy, "you've had

a nice long nap. You shall take one every day, my dear, if you like ; I've no doubt it will do you good."

"Yes'm," said Polly meekly, with a faint little smile.

"I don't know as I shall let you sleep quite so long, always," said Miss Hetty briskly, "for fear you won't rest so well at night ; but we'll see."

"Yes'm," said Polly again ; and Miss Pome-roy never suspected that those two hours on the bed had seemed like weeks to her little guest.

CHAPTER VII

THE FIRST MORNING

POLLY slept soundly that night in her little white bed, and woke to see the sun peeping in at her between the snowy curtains of her east window.

"Dear me!" cried Polly, "I ought to be down-stairs helping Mrs. Manser this very minute!" Then she clapped her little hands over her mouth and lay very still, remembering where she was, and that Mrs. Manser and all her old friends were nearly seven miles away, on Maple Hill.

"I believe I'd better not think about them just now," said Polly winking fast, as she got out of her bed. "Somehow it makes me feel as if I wanted to swallow every minute. Maybe I can do something for Miss Arctura Green if I hurry and get dressed."

But when she stole softly down-stairs wearing the old red frock covered with one of her new white aprons, Polly stopped for a minute

to look up at the tall clock. Near the clock was a high-backed chair, and as Polly heard Arctura's voice and a strange one, she sat down in the chair to wait until Miss Green's visitor departed. She was sitting there when Miss Pomeroy's door opened, and down she came over the stairs.

"So you're up before me, Mary," said the mistress of the house as she held out her hand to the little girl. Polly took the kind hand and shook it vigorously up and down as she had seen grown people do. "For she doesn't want to kiss me, of course," thought Polly wistfully, remembering Mrs. Ramsdell and dear Grandma Manser. "I expect grand people like her don't kiss little girls much."

"I thought," said Polly, when the ceremony was over, "that maybe I could help Miss Arctura set the table for breakfast, but I heard her talking to somebody at the porch door, so I sat down here to wait."

Just then the door into the hall from the library burst open and Arctura appeared with a much vexed expression on her flushed face.

"Morning, both," she said abruptly. "There, I knew you'd be down and waiting! 'Twas old

Jane Hackett kept me ; she's come spying out the land already. I didn't let her into the hall for fear she'd abide with us all day."

"S-h, Arctura!" said Miss Pomeroy gravely, though her lips seemed inclined to twitch a little. "How is Mrs. Hackett's rheumatism to day?"

"Thinks there's a spell coming on, I believe," said Arctura, looking rather crestfallen. "Breakfast's ready, all but the griddle-cakes ; I can't sit down with you, for I've got them to fry."

After breakfast Miss Pomeroy sent Polly out on the broad piazza, that ran across the front of the house and the west side, to play with the kittens.

"I have some plans to talk over with Arctura," said she, "and then I want a little talk with you before I start my letter-writing. Don't step off the piazza, for the grass is very wet. It rained in the night, and I don't wish my guest to take cold," said Miss Pomeroy with her pleasant smile.

"I presume," said Polly to Snip and Snap, as she dangled a string alluringly just above their reach and watched their wild jumps into the air, "Miss Pomeroy is going to speak to me about my top apron button not being buttoned ; but I didn't forget it till she came down. I was going

to ask Miss Arctura Green to fasten it for me. Probably Eleanor had long arms that could reach ; I expect she did. Don't you catch the bottom of this dress, mister," said Polly, uplifting a warning finger at Snap, whose attitude certainly justified firm, quick measures, "for it's just as tender !"

Meanwhile Miss Pomeroy and Arctura were having another consultation in the kitchen.

"I don't know just what to plan about little Mary," said Miss Hetty doubtfully. "You see I want to find out what she likes best to do, so I can tell what kind of a child she is. I want her to act her own nature, but of course I must suggest things and ask some questions, for she's very shy."

"M-m ;" said Arctura thoughtfully, "she handles her knife and fork real pretty. I noticed it as I was in and out the two meals yesterday and to-day. You'd know she'd come of good folks, and I must say that Manser woman's brought her up well, though she's a hatchet-faced piece, if ever I saw one, and given to nagging, if I'm any judge. Supposing you should ride off to the village without Mary this morning, and let me visit with her a little mite ? She's full as used to kitchens as she is to parlors, I expect."

"I believe that would be an excellent idea," said Miss Pomeroy. "Arctura, you are a very sensible woman."

"Sho!" said Arctura, but she turned quickly to the sink to hide a smile of gratification.

"Now, Mary, you and I will have our little talk," said Miss Pomeroy a few minutes later, and then to Polly's great amazement, she sat down in one of the big piazza chairs, and drew the child into her lap.

"I didn't mean to forget that top-button," said Polly bravely, "but you came down-stairs sooner than I expected, and I can't quite reach it, so I was going to ask Miss Arctura to please fasten it for me. I'm sorry I was an untidy girl; 't isn't Mrs. Manser's fault; she spoke to me and spoke to me about my careless habits."

"I've no doubt she did," said Miss Hetty drily; "I presume she'd speak to me about my placket-hook that's generally undone." As she said this she buttoned Polly's apron and gave her a pat which warmed the little girl's heart, and then Miss Hetty held her in such a way that Polly could not see the kind, grave face.

"Now, my dear," she said slowly, "I suppose Mrs. Manser may have told you that I had a little

niece of whom you remind me." Polly nodded her head, and scarcely breathed. "I asked Mrs. Manser to let me have you for at least a month," said Miss Pomeroy unsteadily, "to see—to see if perhaps we might decide to be together as long as I live, my dear. If you are as like my little Eleanor, as I think you may be, in many ways," said Miss Hetty after a pause during which Polly sat very still, "I shall not be able to let you go, I am sure. I'm growing old, Mary, and I need somebody to help me forget it. Eleanor would have done it, I know, though I had not seen her often enough for her to care a great deal about me, I'm——"

Polly turned quickly around as the voice faltered and stopped. She laid her soft cheek against Miss Pomeroy's with a little cry of sympathy.

"I will be just as like Eleanor as ever I can," said Polly earnestly, "and I will love you every minute, and try to do everything you want."

"I want you to have a good time," said Miss Pomeroy, patting the brown curls. "We are old-fashioned people here, and you may find it very dull and quiet, my dear."

"I shall like it very much," said Polly stoutly, and to herself she said, "There! you can help

Miss Pomeroy as well as the poor-farm folks, Polly Prentiss, and if you didn't do it, you'd be as selfish as old Redtop!" Redtop was a rooster, resident at Manser Farm, whose greed and ugliness were by-words in the place of his abode.

"Now I must go to my letter-writing," said Miss Pomeroy briskly after a few moments' silence. She had stroked Polly's curls, with a far-away expression, and then had given her a sudden kiss and set her down on the piazza floor. "I'm obliged to do a good many errands to-day, and I think perhaps I'd better not take you, though I should, generally. Suppose you run out to the kitchen and see if you can help Arctura in any way."

CHAPTER VIII

A LITTLE COOK

HALF an hour later any one who looked in at the windows of the Pomeroy kitchen would have seen a pretty sight. Polly, mounted on a stool, was beating a golden mixture in a white bowl, and Arctura at the opposite end of the long table was stirring whites of eggs carefully into a white batter in a yellow bowl.

"This is what I call solid comfort," said Arctura gaily. "I don't know when I've had such a helper as you are! Miss Hetty's without the gift when it comes to cooking. You wouldn't believe it, but she'd be just as likely to put the eggs right in after the butter, without beating 'em separate, as any other way. Ain't it singular?"

"I expect she writes beautiful letters, Miss Arctura," said Polly, loyally evading the discussion of Miss Pomeroy's weak point.

"My, I guess she does!" said Arctura heartily. "That's it; we've all got different talents. Hiram says he'd full as soon see me with a pistol



SHE WAS BEATING A GOLDEN MIXTURE

pointed at him as with a pen in my hand. The only way I ever wrote a letter was by main strength, and I'd rather take a whipping any time."

"I guess it would be pretty hard work for anybody to whip you," said Polly shrewdly, and Arctura laughed with much relish.

"'Twould now-a-days," she said as she gave the final stir to the batter, "but I've been whipped in my time. I didn't get my growth all at once, you see. Is your cake ready for the pans? You wait till I show you the cunning little brush I'm going to butter the tins with. I'll let you do yours next time, after I've once showed you how. You can't slight the edges or any spot, if you want the cakes to slip out right."

When the heat of the oven had been tested and the little round tins had been put in and the oven doors shut on them, Arctura selected a stout testing straw from a pile on a high shelf above the kitchen sink and seated herself, holding the straw erect in her hand like a tiny weapon.

"I always take this time for a breathing spell," she announced, motioning Polly to another chair, "for if I start in on a fresh job, those cakes more than likely'll get burned; it only takes twenty-five minutes to bake 'em to the Queen's taste."

"Yes'm," said Polly, then she looked eagerly over at Arctura. "Did you ever see little Eleanor?" she asked breathlessly.

"No, never," said Arctura, and Polly felt a throb of disappointment. "You see Squire Pomeroy didn't depart this life till a year ago last December, and he was kind of queer," (Arctura tapped her forehead significantly,) "the last few years, and 'twasn't a cheerful place to bring a child. And he'd hardly let his daughter out of his sight. About once in six months I'd send her off to Shelby to see the twins for two or three days, but I was always put to it to keep the Squire satisfied till she got back."

"Was he cross?" asked Polly.

"Not to say cross," replied Arctura slowly, "but terrible decided, and unreasonable. Miss Hetty's had her trials, and so've I; money isn't all."

"No'm," said Polly soberly, "but it does a great many things, Miss Arctura. Did you know how poor this town is? Manser Farm leaks in places, and the paint is all gone, and the ceilings drop sometimes, pieces of them, I mean. But the town is too poor to help fix any of those things. Uncle Sam Blodgett and Father Manser would shingle the roof quick enough though they aren't

as spry as once they were, if only they could set eyes on the shingles," said Polly quoting freely from her old friends.

"It's a stingy town, I'm afraid," said Arctura shaking her head. "The Squire was the most liberal man in it, and Miss Hetty follows right on, but most of the purse-strings are drawn pretty close. Sometime I'll tell you a little story about the Squire and me when I was your age ; you remind me to relate it to you. We haven't got time now," she said glancing at the clock, "for those cakes have got to come out in a minute, and then I'll have to fly around ; dinner-time always gains on me, someday."

"Do you know anything special I could do to please Miss Pomeroy?" asked Polly wistfully. "She's being so good to me."

"Let's see ;" said Arctura meditatively. "Why of course she wants you to enjoy yourself. I expect she'd be pleased to see you take notice of things like the old shells and so on, and there's the books ; Bobby liked to read, and she always said Eleanor was quite a hand for stories, too. And you could go to walk with her, pleasant days, same as Bobby did last winter. And she'd be glad to see you relish your food."

"Oh, I do, Miss Arctura," cried Polly, "I do, every single bite I take!"

"Well now, that's good news," said Miss Green comfortably. "I can't think of anything else; you do all right so far as I know. I wouldn't worry, but just do my best every day as things come along. Now we'll take a look at those cakes."

"She didn't say a word about playing or running around," thought Polly as Arctura rose to open the oven doors; "of course she thinks I'm too big now for those things, just as Mrs. Manser said. There's a girl in the village that's most twelve, and she plays with a dolly, for I've seen her. But she belonged to somebody, and that's different I guess, from when you're going to be adopted."

Polly's lips seemed inclined to quiver for a moment, but then her cakes—the dozen golden-brown cakes—were lifted from the oven and set on the table, and in the rush of delight at seeing the delicate tops puffed up above the edges of the tins, the quiver changed to a smile.

"Arctura says you are a born cook," said Miss Pomeroy at dinner-time, "and she has requested the pleasure of your company to-morrow morning when she makes the pies."

Polly dimpled with pleasure ; she was eating steadily, just as much as she could. Miss Pomeroy noticed her increased appetite with agreeable surprise.

“ Miss Arctura was very, very kind to me,” said the little girl sedately, “ and I had a beautiful time and Miss Arctura said if the minister—the supply minister that’s nothing more or less than a bashful boy according to her ideas—came to dinner Sunday she should set four of my cakes along with four of hers on the table for dessert with the pudding.”

Miss Pomeroy suppressed an inclination to laugh, and told Polly she had understood from Arctura that the cakes were a great success.

“ But the minister is not a boy, my dear,” she added ; “ you must not always take what Arctura says word for word. She used to call me her little girl until I was more than thirty years old.”

Then Miss Pomeroy and Polly had a laugh together, though Polly could not help feeling that Arctura was very brave indeed ever to have called the tall mistress of Pomeroy Oaks her little girl.

After dinner came the two naps, or at least Miss Pomeroy’s nap and Polly’s hour on the bed. Yesterday’s experience had taught Polly that an

hour's nap would be considered enough for her, so at the end of that time she got off the bed softly and after making herself tidy for the rest of the day she stole quietly down-stairs. It was a mild afternoon and the big front door had been half opened so that the spring air might blow through the screen.

"Of course if she asks me if I've been asleep, I shall have to say no," said Polly looking a little bit troubled as she stood at the door, "but I don't believe she will ask me. Of course big girls that want to be adopted can learn to go to sleep in the day time, just as grand grown up folks do, and I shall learn as soon as ever I can."

Polly stepped out on the piazza and walked softly up and down, sniffing the air, and thinking how little fear she would have had of the damp ground if she could have run out barefoot as she did so often at Manser Farm and she gave a little sigh as she looked down at the shiny shoes Miss Pomeroy had brought home for her that morning. But Snip and Snap, came racing up on the piazza from somewhere, ready for a frolic, and Polly did not disappoint them.

Arctura appeared on the kitchen porch, collecting the milk pans that had been sunning all day,

and snapped her fingers to attract Polly's attention.

"Look here," she called, "my brother Hiram is feeling real neglected because you haven't been nigh the barn since you came. Can't you step out and visit with him for a spell now? I'll call you whenever Miss Hetty wants you."

Polly needed no second invitation. She was ready to go wherever anyone wished, but above all things she had longed to see the barn, with Daisy in it; and Hiram reminded her in some ways of Uncle Sam Blodgett, though she could not have told just how. Certainly the two men did not look alike, for Uncle Blodgett was lean and wiry, with a long, thin, nervous face, while Hiram was stout and ruddy, and never in a hurry about anything.

CHAPTER IX

HIRAM

POLLY went down the steps and along the driveway to the barn. Hiram was sitting on a long bench just inside the door, rubbing and polishing some silvery bells. He looked at Polly with a broad and hospitable smile.

"It appeared to me 'twas about time we got acquainted," he remarked sociably. "I had some expectations you might drop in on me come milking time last night, but I suppose you had other engagements. Can you spare time to sit awhile? Your friends seem to feel at home," said Hiram with a wave of his hand toward Snip and Snap, who had followed Polly and were racing up the steep stairs to the hay-loft.

"I can stay till Miss Pomeroy wants me," said Polly delightedly, as she slid on to the end of the bench. "Is there room for me here, Mr. Hiram?"

"Let's see," said Hiram gravely, taking a foot-

rule from his pocket and measuring the distance between Polly and some bells lying beside him on the bench. "There's most a yard leeway ; if you don't wriggle more'n twelve inches this way there'll be no trouble."

Hiram closed the rule and put it in his pocket ; as he did this, Polly heard a subdued chuckle. She clasped her arms about her knees and rocked back and forth on the bench, laughing gayly.

"Oh, you're some like Uncle Sam Blodgett !" she cried as Hiram looked at her in pretended alarm. "That's the way he used to talk to me, all solemn, but with fun inside of him. Oh, I like folks that talk like you and Uncle Blodgett !"

Hiram rose from the bench, and made a low bow to Polly, the bells jingling in his hands.

"That's the first compliment that's come my way since I got through my schooling," he said with a twinkle in his blue eyes. "While I was 'tending school the teachers would praise me up because I had a good head for remembering. I could recite pieces. There was a piece beginning 'On Linden when the sun was low,' that was in considerable demand. I presume I could recollect it, if given time."

"Oh, will you please say it to me, some time?" pleaded Polly. "I do love to hear poetry!"

"I'll teach it to you, gestures and all," said Hiram much gratified. "There's a good deal depends on the gestures, mind. What's this now coming to interrupt?" he added as Arctura appeared in the doorway.

"Mis' Deacon Talcott has come to call, and Miss Hetty told me to send Mary in," said Arctura. "She's a real pleasant woman, you won't mind her." She straightened out Polly's apron bows, and the little girl walked slowly away, after saying good-by to her host and promising to "call again soon."

"She's got a pair of honest eyes in her head as ever I saw, and she's a real sweet-dispositioned child," said Arctura looking after Polly. "but I don't know as I ever saw one of her age so quiet, unless she was sick or stupid, and this child isn't either one."

"She's been kept with a parcel of old folks, and we aren't much better," said Hiram thoughtfully. "Miss Hetty was telling me she couldn't seem to find out any kind of play the child cared about, but I said to her, give the little thing time; probably work is what she's used to, more'n any-

thing else ; let her get used to play, gradual, I say ; don't try to make her give up her old folks' ways all at once. She's ready for fun, soon as she knows it is fun," said Hiram, "I can see that."

"Well," said Arctura briskly, "I'll say one thing for her, she don't tell how hard she's been worked, or say anything but what's pleasant about the Manser Farm folks. She seems fond of 'em all, and yet I kind of think she holds back something, for once in awhile she'll start to tell one thing or another, and then stop and bite her lip."

"I know one thing, sure," said Hiram firmly, as his sister stepped out of the barn. "That little thing's no hypocrite, nor no cheat, or my name's something beside Green ! Let's see, how did that piece go ? 'On Linden when the sun was low, all bloodless lay the untrodden snow.' Soon as I get these bells out of my hands," he muttered as he turned back to the bench, "I'll just run through that, with the gestures. I don't believe there's a line of it could escape me, if I were going on a hundred !"

CHAPTER X

A DELIGHTFUL CALLER

POLLY had no trouble on her mind when Mrs. Talcott left the house after an hour's call. She knew from the visitor's gentle, sweet face and manner as well as from her beautiful black silk gown that she was another grand person like Miss Hetty. Polly had often seen Mrs. Talcott at church in the distance and had admired her from the Manser pew which was in the gallery back where the shadows gathered. Polly had once watched a sunbeam dance on a violet bow in Mrs. Talcott's bonnet.

"How do you do, my dear?" the visitor had asked when Miss Pomeroy presented "little Mary Prentiss" to her. "I'm sure I have caught a glimpse of you now and then at church. I believe you don't go to the Number Three school with my children, do you?"

"I am very well thank you, ma'am," said Polly sedately, though her dimples showed. "Yes'm

I have seen you in church ; the sun comes in the gallery window and dances on your bonnet sometimes, just as pretty. No, ma'am, I go to Number Four, where there are just five boys and nobody else but me. The teacher says it's hardly worth while to keep a school for five sprawling boys that will be farmers when all's said and done, and one little girl that's nobody " said Polly quoting Mrs. Manser without a touch of injured feeling, " but we're out of the other districts, the Higgins boys and I are, ma'am."

Mrs. Talcott flushed, and drew the little girl to her side.

"I've brought you a present, Mary," she said, putting a box into Polly's hands. "My children always like a surprise, and I knew you wouldn't be expecting this; it's very pure candy," said Mrs. Talcott looking over Polly's head to Miss Pomeroy for approval, "it cannot possibly hurt her."

It seemed too good to be true, but there were dozens of the delicious chocolate drops in the box. Polly's cheeks grew crimson as she saw them.

"Mrs. Deacon Talcott," she said, lifting her shining eyes to this wonderful visitor, "I expect I don't know how to thank you right, but I do

wish I did ! I've had so many presents now, you could hardly believe. It began before I left Manser Farm. I had new clothes, bought right out of the store the gingham was, and nobody had ever worn it before. I wish I had one of those dresses on, to show you," said Polly who had been advised by Miss Pomeroy to keep on her red frock under a white apron for the afternoon.

"Never mind, my dear," said Miss Pomeroy, exchanging a quick glance with her caller, "Mrs. Talcott may see it some other day.

"Yes'm," said Polly, "and then Uncle Sam Blodgett gave me a knife that will be an extra fine article if I should get the broken blade fixed, and some slippery elm, and Aunty Peebles gave me a dear little pincushion, and Miss Pomeroy bought me a bag of gum-drops and chocolates—but those are gone all but one, for Miss Arctura likes them ; she has a sweet tooth, though she doesn't often indulge it, she says—and then Miss Pomeroy bought me these beautiful shoes that I have on," she finished breathlessly, sticking out one small foot for inspection. "You see it's been presents and presents," said Polly beaming upon Mrs. Talcott and then turning to Miss Hetty with a face aglow with gratitude.

"So it seems, my dear," said the visitor, and when Polly mentioned her plan in regard to Aunty Peebles, Mrs. Talcott said cordially, "why not send her part of these chocolates, Mary?"

"I hoped and hoped you'd say for me to do that," said Polly earnestly. "If you please, Miss Pomeroy, I would like to send them the middle of next week for it always seems long then to Aunty Peebles from Sunday to Sunday. She values her privileges very much," said Polly.

"You shall send them next Wednesday if all goes well," said Miss Pomeroy, "and perhaps you'd like to write a letter to go with them. We'll see about it. And now you may run off, Mary, and read or do anything you like."

Polly said good-by, and then as she reached the doorway she turned and made a curtsy to the guest.

"Will you please pay my respects to your family," said Polly, and then she departed, hugging her precious box.

"I believe I was just about like Eleanor that time," she said as she put her new treasure away in the top bureau drawer, "for they both looked as pleased as could be. Now I'm going to the library to pick out a book, and take it out on the

south porch. Seems as if probably I could read better out doors."

Miss Pomeroy and her visitor were in the parlor and the door was closed so Polly had no fear of disturbing them. She had never owned any books except the Bible and her school Reader, but she had heard a great deal about stories from her friends at Manser Farm. Uncle Sam Blodgett had a battered Shakespeare from which he had recited extracts, and Polly had looked upon the book with awe.

"I guess I'd better begin with a small book," she said as she stood for a moment undecided in the centre of the library, looking about at the bewildering display of literature. "Of course small books are meant for girls and boys, and I'll take one from that shelf under the window; probably those are the ones Bobby reads. Miss Pomeroy said yesterday I could choose anything I liked. Here's one that won't take very long," said Polly, kneeling to slip a small, leather-covered volume from its place.

"'S-e-s-a-m-e and Lilies'; that's a pretty name," she said approvingly. "I don't know what sesame means, but probably I shall when I've read far enough. There aren't any pictures,

but Uncle Sam Blodgett's book didn't have any pictures either, except one in the front, of the gentleman that wrote it. I'll go out on the porch and begin right off."

On the south porch there were two low wooden chairs, and Polly seated herself in one of these, resolutely facing away from the big oaks which waved their branches so alluringly, and appeared to be inviting her to play with them and follow their beckoning down the road.

The book seemed very strange and hard to understand, but Polly read on bravely page after page, stopping now and then to spell a word softly, and shake her curly head over it. When she had read ten pages she closed the book with a little sigh of relief.

"If I read it by tens I can remember the place better," said Polly to the oaks, "and I don't believe it makes much difference where I stop, because it goes right on and on, and there doesn't seem to be any story to it. I didn't suppose there were so many long words in the world, but Uncle Sam Blodgett always says 'understanding comes with experience,' and I guess I shall have a good deal of experience before I finish this book," said Polly soberly.

She felt a little bit lonely in spite of all the good things that had been showered upon her.

"I wish I could paddle in that brook down in the meadow, and I wish I could see what's growing in the woods," said Polly wistfully. "I guess I'm not very much like Eleanor yet. I don't suppose she ever wanted to go barefooted."

This was rather sorrowful, but after Mrs. Talcott had gone Miss Pomeroy and Polly took a pleasant walk under the big oaks, and Miss Pomeroy smiled (with pleasure Polly thought), when she saw the book the little girl had chosen. And after supper there was a delightful time in the barn while Hiram milked. Altogether Polly felt modestly contented when she got into bed that night. She had composed a short prayer which she added to her usual petitions.

"Dear Father in Heaven," prayed little Polly, "please make me just as much like Eleanor as You think it's best for me to be, for You know all about her. Amen."

CHAPTER XI

A PLEASANT PLAN

SATURDAY was a busy day. Polly not only helped Arctura in the kitchen, but together they made the beds, for Miss Hetty, who usually preferred to take that duty upon herself, had to go away unexpectedly for an hour or so after breakfast. So Arctura and Polly turned the feather beds and "plumped them up," put the mattresses squarely over them without any bulging out of the soft beds below, then stretched the sheets as smooth and tight as they could be drawn, and over them the fleecy blankets—Polly's were striped with pink—and last of all they put on the snowy counterpanes and patted the stout pillows till they lay round and even at the head of each bed.

Snip and Snap added their society in Miss Pomeroy's room. Suddenly Snip vanished, and Snap seemed much distressed. Arctura, who had been struggling to reduce an unaccountable

lump on her side of the bed, made an exclamation and drew out the sheets and blankets, and Snip, breathless but unvanquished, slid to the floor.

"My land!" ejaculated Miss Green, surveying the kitten with apparent disgust. "If you haven't got any more sense than to go where you'll be made up with a bed, it doesn't seem as if you were worth raising!" But she took Snip up in her arms and stroked him, receiving for reward a vigorous scratch on the nose.

"Well now, aren't you the ungratefulest little piece that ever was," said Arctura, setting him hastily down, and tenderly caressing her injured feature. "Didn't you know to-morrow was Sunday and the minister coming to dinner? You've settled one thing. I shouldn't be willing to sit down to a meal, facing him, all battered up this way. I shall tell Miss Hetty, so she needn't consider it for a minute," said Miss Green firmly as she led the way to the kitchen.

There were two squash pies and two apple pies to be made that morning and Polly was allowed to help with the rolling, and to crimp all the edges of the crust with a delightful little

wheel. Arctura watched her with the first pie, but after that she bustled about the kitchen singing a gay little refrain :

“O—she—was—as—beautiful as a butterfly
And as proud as a queen,
Was pretty little Polly Perkins,
Of Abingdon Green,”

sang Arctura over and over again, and little Polly Prentiss listened with delight.

“You have a splendid voice, haven’t you, Miss Arctura?” she said when at last the song stopped as the pies were put in the oven. “And what pretty words there are to that tune.”

“My voice isn’t anything now to what it was,” said Miss Green evidently much pleased. “I can’t rely on it as I once could. When my brother John (that lives out West) and I were in our teens we used to be called for far and near, whenever there was music wanted. He had a good tenor voice, and I could sing way up above the staff without straining my tones a mite. But now I’m getting old and I have to bear just as light as I can on the high notes, and there’s a number down toward “g” on the second line that are apt to fail me when I’m

least expecting it," said Arctura, and Polly thought her voice sounded a little sad.

"I think it's all beautiful," said Polly with perfect sincerity. "It's a great deal better than anybody's voice in the choir at the church, I am just sure!"

"They've got some young folks in the singing seats that lack training," said Arctura, and then she dismissed that subject. "You put me in mind of that 'Polly Perkins' someway," she remarked, sitting down in the big kitchen rocker, and pulling the little girl into her lap. "To be sure your name's Mary, and of course favor's a deceitful thing and beauty's a vain snare, but someway you brought that song to mind when you were crimping those pie edges."

"I don't believe I'm much like a queen, Miss Arctura," said Polly, greatly pleased, but a little confused. "I haven't any crown, you see, or any trailing dresses, and I haven't anything to be proud about. I expect queens look like this, don't you?" and springing to her feet Polly tossed back her head and stood with her chin raised and her small nose tilted up into the air, gazing out of the window.

"Mercy me, that's almost like play acting!"

cried Arctura. "I guess Hiram can teach you gestures easy enough. I understand you're going to commit 'On Linden.' Well, it's a real stirring piece and it'll give you good exercise. Hiram's all over the lot, when he says it. He rehearsed it to me last night, and I said to him he'd got to bear in mind that little girls weren't grown men, and not keep you thrashing round, stooping down, and reaching up, every last living minute. I pointed out a few places where he could omit some of his arm work, and he's going to do so. I shall expect to be invited to a performance when you get it all learned."

"Yes, indeed," said Polly gayly, "and perhaps Miss Pomeroy would come too. I know some pieces that Uncle Blodgett taught me, but they hadn't any gestures except a bow at the beginning and one at the end. And Mr. Hiram must know other poems, doesn't he?"

"He's full of 'em as a nut is of meat," laughed Arctura, "both prose pieces and poetry, and all he wants is opportunity. Why I've heard him many a time, spouting away to himself in the barn, but I've never taken any notice, for you give an inch to these people that recite, and they'll take an ell quick enough; it's just like

starting a leak. But a regular performance, such as you speak of, with different ones taking part, I believe Miss Hetty would enjoy it for once any way ; she don't have much to amuse her."

" And you would sing ? " asked Polly eagerly.

" Um-m— 'twould be according to whether I could depend on my voice. I could try it with the scales, I expect, late in the afternoon," said Arctura, " and then we could give the entertainment right after supper, soon as the dishes were cleared up. Goodness me ! look at that clock ! it's most half-past ten ! " and then there was a busy time in the kitchen until the noon hour brought dinner and rest.

CHAPTER XII

SESAME AND LILIES

AFTER her resting hour on the bed Polly took her book again from the low shelf and read another ten pages. Before Miss Pomeroy went to her room after dinner, Polly asked for a pencil and paper, and Miss Hetty gave her a pad of smooth paper in a pretty linen cover to which a sharp pencil was attached by a long red ribbon.

"Another present!" the little girl exclaimed when Miss Pomeroy told her she was to keep the pad "for her very own."

"Another present," said the mistress of the house, smiling down into the brown eyes, and she kissed Polly as she stood at the foot of the stairs.

Polly's head felt warm and tired and she longed to run out into the woods with her book, but with the thought of Eleanor in her mind she set her lips firmly and took her seat on the south porch, and began her self-appointed task. Polly would have been spared a good deal of trouble if she could have overheard what Miss Pomeroy

was saying to Arctura, while the little girl sat so quietly reading and copying words from the leather-covered book to the paper in her lap.

"I don't know just what to make of little Mary," said Miss Pomeroy looking rather disturbed. "She is so busy reading and writing that she didn't hear me come down-stairs, and she is reading a book by Ruskin which is suitable for grown people, and I don't see how she can possibly understand it, or enjoy it. Yet there she sits, copying a few words 'to look up in the dictionary' she told me. Do you suppose most little girls of ten, now-a-days would do that? Of course you and I haven't had anything to do with children for a long time," said Miss Pomeroy gravely. "I might ride over to Maple Hill farm, and ask Mrs. Manser if Mary has been used to books, but I dislike the woman, and I should prefer not to do it."

"I wouldn't bother," said Arctura easily, "probably she's kind of forward for her age, but I guess we can liven her up by degrees. She's real fond of a good time, provided it's quiet, now. You see she eats a good deal and she don't exercise much, and take that with her nap every afternoon and reading so long, I expect she feels sort of

dull some of the time. She's a good deal livelier at her work than I am," said Miss Green presently, "and she's a sweet little thing if ever there was one in this world. I'm getting fond of her right along. Come Monday, how would it be if I should speak of her going out to play awhile in the afternoon? She could take her book along to the woods. I can tell her of a place. We've got to make a start with her sometime."

Miss Pomeroy cordially approved this plan. After a few minutes she went out on the porch, and soon she and Polly started for a walk. Miss Pomeroy was a little troubled with rheumatism so the walk was not a brisk-one, but Polly stepped soberly along at her side, and together they talked of the birds and the flowers. They saw and heard eight birds that day, and Polly recounted them to Arctura after supper—a robin, a crow, a ground sparrow, a song sparrow, a blue jay, a phoebe-bird, a red-winged blackbird, and a thrush.

"Spring is upon us without a doubt," said Polly, joyfully quoting Miss Pomeroy. "And oh, it's so pretty along the edges of the road, Miss Arctura!"

"How'd you like to go off into the woods with your book, some day?" suggested Miss Green, and she was mystified by the look that came into the child's eyes.

"I'd like to very much, if Miss Pomeroy thinks best," said Polly quietly, but her heart was dancing.

Meanwhile Miss Pomeroy was looking at the top sheet of Polly's pad, laid on the dictionary, "for I think I will find out about those words before I read any more," Polly had said. This was the list: "Acquirement, mercenary, punctilious, sagacity, concomitants, unsullied, devastated, macademization, trivial, boulevard, burgher, martello, vestige, erroneous, consecutive, assigned."

"You understand all the words you have read except these?" questioned Miss Pomeroy with her keen eyes on Polly's flushed face, as the little girl straightened up from her study of the big dictionary, when bed-time came.

"No, ma'am," said Polly honestly, "but I could guess most of the other long ones, and I wanted to get on with the book." Then suddenly the little girl felt very brave. "Would—would Eleanor have known all those words without the dictionary, all of them?" she ventured.

“My dear child,” said Miss Pomeroy gently—and she did not look as if she were at all vexed—“my dear little Mary, there are several of those words I myself should be obliged to look up in the dictionary before I dared to try to tell anyone exactly what they meant. Now run along to bed, and get to sleep as fast as ever you can,” and Miss Pomeroy bent her head and kissed the bright face upturned to hers.

“That’s twice to-day,” said Polly, hugging herself as she lay in bed, just before the Sandman carried her off to Slumberland. “That’s twice to-day she kissed me! I guess I’m getting on pretty well. I believe I must be!”

CHAPTER XIII

POLLY AND THE MINISTER

SUNDAY was usually a hard day for Polly. In the first place there were good clothes to be put on and taken care of, and then there was sitting still in church ! Sitting still was the most difficult thing in the world for Polly.

"In the Manser pew I could wriggle, because it was way back and nobody down-stairs saw me, but I guess I've got to behave just like grown folks to-day," said Polly anxiously as she put on the brown cashmere frock Sunday morning. "But if I listen to the minister most of the time, and think about Eleanor when I get tired listening, perhaps I can do it."

It was not so hard after all, for the minister had a pleasant, boyish face and he used simple language which Polly could understand. Besides that his sermon was short—the shortest one Polly had ever heard ; she wondered if by any chance the minister could know about those yellow cakes

he was to have for dessert, and felt in a hurry to taste them. Miss Pomeroy had seen him the day before.

“He looks as if he liked to eat good things,” thought Polly as the minister read the closing hymn, “and Miss Pomeroy may have told him there was citron in them. His cheeks are as red as mine were—redder than mine are, to-day.”

This was comforting, and moreover it was true. Polly had been out of doors very little for the last week, and besides that, although she was not unhappy, the thought of Eleanor was continually before her, and the fear of falling below an unknown standard made her anxious and troubled many times in the day. So the roses in Polly’s cheeks did not bloom as brightly as they had at Manser Farm, and the little girl was greatly encouraged.

During the service she could not turn around to see her old friends up in the dimly lighted gallery, and when the benediction had been pronounced Miss Pomeroy said she and Polly would sit quietly in her pew until the minister came out. The little girl looked disturbed, and Miss Pomeroy laid her hand on Polly’s with a smile.

“You needn’t be afraid of the minister, my

dear," she added kindly, "he likes children, and has two little sisters at home."

Polly smiled faintly in return. When the minister came, and they had all walked slowly down the aisle together, there was no sign of the Manser wagon, but Polly was sure she could hear it way up the road; it had a peculiar rattle, not to be mistaken for any other. The little girl had a sober face as she climbed up into the seat beside Hiram, with the minister's help.

"I'm grateful I've got you instead of the preacher," said Hiram facing straight ahead, as soon as Miss Pomeroy and the minister were fairly launched in conversation. "I've always been to church, and I'm a member, but I'm scared of speaking to 'em, it don't make any difference whether they're young or old. What's the matter, honey? Don't you tell me without you're a mind to."

"I thought perhaps I'd see the Manser Farm folks," said Polly. "I thought maybe Uncle Blodgett would want to wait, and Auntie Peebles. I don't know as Mrs. Ramsdell came if her rheumatism was bad."

"She was there," said Hiram quietly. "I know 'em all by sight, and once in awhile I have

a little talk with Mr. Manser when we're taking the horses out of the sheds. But to-day Mrs. Manser hurried him up, and hustled the three old folks into the wagon as if something was after her. I shouldn't have dared to offer Mis' Ramsdell anything unless I'd wanted it bit in halves, when she got in," said Hiram with a low chuckle. "She spoke her mind good and free, too; I don't recall ever hearing anyone speak freer. She was all for waiting to see you."

"Then I think Mrs. Manser was real mean," said Polly with flushed cheeks. "I don't suppose she meant to be, but I think she was!"

Hiram reached out his big brown hand and gave Polly's fingers a sympathetic squeeze.

"I expect we are about as naughty as we can be, both of us," he said softly, "but I take real comfort in it once in a while. That Manser woman's no favorite of mine, nor ever was. I can't abide her."

"She took care of me for seven years," said Polly in a spasm of loyalty, forgetting how little of the care had really come on Mrs. Manser's shoulders, "and I do try to love her."

"Love don't always come by trying," said Hiram tranquilly, "but I suppose it's no harm

to give it a fair chance. And as for those old folks of yours, you shall see 'em next Sunday, if I have to tote Mr. Manser down behind the sheds and keep him there."

Then Hiram puckered his lips and softly whistled "Duke Street" all the rest of the way to Pomeroy Oaks, while Polly sat beside him, much cheered and comforted.

Dinner was an exciting meal to the little girl. It was the first time, as she told Arctura afterward, that Polly had ever seen a minister eat. This minister not only ate with great heartiness, but he talked a good deal and frequently smiled across the table at her, and he had a jolly laugh. Polly was glad of that for more than one reason. Arctura had covered the scratch on her nose with a long, broad strip of black court-plaster, and this decoration made her naturally prominent feature more noticeable than ever. She carried her head very high, and bore the dishes in and out with a stately tread, but her eyes twinkled so when she looked at Polly that the little girl had much ado to keep a straight face.

When the dessert came, Polly held her breath while the minister ate his first mouthful of a yellow cake; he had chosen it instead of one of Arc-

tura's "snowflakes." Miss Pomeroy had tasted one the day before and pronounced it delicious. The minister ate every crumb, and when the plate was passed to him a second time, he laughed boyishly.

"These are almost too good," he said, "I should like to compliment the cook."

Miss Pomeroy smiled at Polly.

"My little guest made them," said she.

"Dear me," said the minister heartily, "I shall have to tell my sisters about this when I go home. One of them must be just about Mary's age; she is eight years old."

"Oh, but I'm going on eleven," said Polly eagerly, "only I'm small for my age, sir."

"Indeed, that's very surprising," and the minister smiled most cordially at the little cook. Polly was perfectly delighted when Miss Pomeroy suggested that instead of a nap she might take a walk with the minister and show him the grounds. Miss Pomeroy was to drive him back to Deacon Talcott's house, late in the afternoon.

"I will take my nap as usual, Mary, if you think you can look after Mr. Endicott," she had said, and the minister and Polly exchanged a glance of much confidence and friendliness.

They walked about, hand in hand, and there was no doubt that Polly entertained the minister.

"Miss Pomeroy tells me she hopes you will stay with her for always," the minister said as they stood together looking down at the brook in a place where it tinkled over some stones. Polly gave a little cry of delight and squeezed the minister's hand.

"Oh, did she say it that way?" she asked earnestly.

"Why, yes," said the young man smiling down at her, "didn't you know it?"

"She's a beautiful, kind lady," said Polly, shaking her brown curls till they danced, "and I do truly love her, but she's so tall and quiet I shouldn't like to ask her questions all the time, and I have to ask her a good many—about my clothes and ever so many other things. Now if it were you, I shouldn't be a bit afraid because your eyes look so young and happy," said the little girl frankly. "Miss Pomeroy has sad eyes, and I'm always afraid I'll make them sadder. Don't you see?"

"I think I do," said the minister gently, "but I am sure you will help Miss Pomeroy's eyes and not hurt them, by talking freely to her."

"Yes, sir," said Polly doubtfully. "Do your little sisters like to read, Mr. Endicott? I am reading a book called 'Sesame and Lilies,' by Mr. Ruskin."

"Phew!" said the minister. "That's a fine book, Mary, but I should say it was a little old for you. Who chose it? Miss Pomeroy?"

"No sir, I chose it myself," said Polly proudly, "off the shelf where all the little books are, under the window. Miss Pomeroy said I could choose."

"When we go in the house," said the minister, as they started on together, swinging hands, "I'll show you a book to read; I saw it on one of the shelves. It's a big book, but the stories are short. If I were in your place, Mary, I'd read one of them to-morrow. My little sisters love them all."

So it came about that when Miss Pomeroy and the minister drove away they left on the piazza a little girl whose heart was almost gay, for the book the minister had chosen and which Miss Pomeroy had told Polly she might keep in her own room, was full of delightful pictures, and on the cover was printed in gold letters "Wonder Stories, by Hans Christian Andersen."

"And mind you try to remember them just as

you do the sermon on Sunday," the minister had said as he parted from Polly, "for they are sure to give you happy thoughts." And Polly, running to Arctura who was seated on the south porch in a chair that rocked with a loud squeak, cried joyfully.

"Oh, Miss Arctura, the minister has chosen a book for me, one that his sisters love! And I'm not going to read another word in 'Sesame and Lilies' till I'm most grown up! For Miss Pome-roy said 'twas a wise thought and an imptersposition of Providence!"

CHAPTER XIV

IN THE WOODS

POLLY's worry about being satisfactory to Miss Pomeroy had departed with the minister's words down by the brook, but as she lay in bed the next morning, listening to the birds out in a big elm tree the branches of which came near one of her windows, she had some sober thoughts.

"The reason Miss Pomeroy is going to adopt me," said Polly to herself, "is because she thinks I'm like Eleanor. I'm not like her, inside, of course, but I'm trying to be. Now don't you be a selfish girl, Polly Prentiss. You've got a beautiful home with a lovely, kind lady that does things for you all the time, and Miss Arctura and Mr. Hiram beside, just as good as they can be, and the kittens to play with, and Daisy out in her stall, and you can go off into the woods this afternoon, and take the book that the minister's sisters love, and perhaps they'll let you go again some other day.

"And all you've got to do," said Polly severely

to herself, "is to stop wanting to run out doors morning, noon, and night, and wanting to play with a doll, and wishing somebody'd call you Polly, and not mind having to eat so much, or lying down on this bed that gets so hot in the afternoon, and stop being lonesome for the folks at Manser Farm, and learn how to mend your clothes. I guess that's about all, and it isn't much for a girl that's going on eleven."

Polly had a delightful time that afternoon. Arctura had taken in the snow-white clothes from the line, and informed the little girl that she had no intention of ironing that day, and would make an excursion into the woods with her.

"I've got a crick in my back," Miss Green announced when Polly descended from her hour on the bed, "and what I need is to get right down close to nature. I'll take my old gray shawl and pick me out a good place to sit in the sun, and I'll knit on Hiram's socks while you run around and see what you can see. Perhaps you can up a bouquet to fetch home to Miss Hetty, who knows? And when you feel so minded you can sit on the shawl alongside of me, and read me out a story, maybe. It's a pity Miss Hetty can't be with us, but she's no hand to walk; she

hasn't been overly strong for ten years back, though she can do all that's required."

Polly felt disloyal to Miss Pomeroy because it was a relief to know Arctura would be her only companion. Her little heart was full of affectionate gratitude, but the tall mistress of the house inspired a good deal of awe as well, while with Arctura Polly had a sense of comradeship, in spite of the difference in years, and was not afraid to chatter like a magpie.

By three o'clock the pair were deep in the woods, and Arctura was enthroned on her gray shawl, spread on a rock that stood like a table in an open space between giant pines. She had four knitting-needles and a ball of flaming red yarn in her hands, and looked the picture of contentment.

"Now," she said drawing out a big silver watch from the front of her gown and placing it beside her on the shawl, "it's only a few minutes past three. You lay your book down here and don't let me see you again for an hour, or as near that as you can judge by your feelings. Don't stray so far you can't get back. I'll holler once in awhile so's to keep track of you, but you caper round and see what you find."

Polly trotted off obediently, and found all sorts of treasures. If she had not been obliged to respond to Arctura's loud "Ma-a-a-ry!" three or four times, it would have seemed to the little girl that she was all alone in a new world, for the pine grove was unlike the woods through which Polly had wandered in that far-away time when she lived at Manser Farm. Those were birches and scrubby oaks with an occasional hemlock, and you had to look out for slippery tree-roots, and scratching underbrush, and boggy places. But this wood had a soft brown carpet of needles, and a border of beautiful ferns, and here and there were little cones, and clumps of stems that had belonged to "Dutchman's pipes."

In a little while there would be "wake-robins" and "Solomon's seal," and many other wild wood flowers. Polly saw the first signs of a venturesome "lady's slipper." She gathered long trails of Princess pine and looped them around her waist, and she picked some of the prettiest ferns to take home to Miss Pomeroy. There were several cleared places, like the one which held Arctura's throne; Polly named one the library and another the parlor, and in still

another there were some stones which made her think of pillows.

“ So I shall name that the bedroom,” she said to Arctura when the call “Ti-i-i-mes up !” had brought her running back, “and this I think we’d better call the dining-room, don’t you?”

“ Seems a sensible name to me,” said Miss Green approvingly. “ Now suppose you read me out a story. I just looked into your book while you were off, and here’s one that my eye lighted on ; suppose we have that.”

The story was “The Ugly Duckling,” and the words were so easy that Polly read on and on, scarcely ever having to stop for Arctura’s help. When she had finished it, she drew a long breath and shut the book.

“ Isn’t it a beautiful, interesting story, Miss Arctura ? ” she asked eagerly, and her friend nodded with great vigor before she spoke.

“ It’s what I call fair,” said Arctura with decision, “ and that’s what I like in real life or in a story. And that’s why I expect that the poor folks that get hurt and slammed around and put upon in this world are going to have crowns of gold and harps of silver and songs of everlasting praise and joy in the next one ; or what-

ever those things stand for, to 'em. We'll have another of those stories next time we come out a pleasuring together, won't we?"

Polly assented with joy, and all through the talk that followed, while she told of her morning's trip to the village, those delightful words "next time" rang out their lovely promise in Polly's happy ears.

She and Arctura walked home arm in arm, although that meant that Polly had to stretch up, and Miss Green to reach down, but the path was broad enough for two, and they sang "Marching through Georgia" and stepped gayly along to the brisk measures.

"Slow walking, except for those that have infirmities and are obliged," said Arctura, "is a trial of the flesh and spirit, or it ought to be, if it isn't," and little Polly, with more color in her cheeks than had been there for days, looked joyfully up at her.

"Oh, Miss Arctura," she said fervently, "you do have such splendid ideas!"

"Don't you try to flatter an old lady of fifty-four, child," said Miss Green, shaking her ball of yarn at Polly with pretended severity. "You turn your mind on those clouds; see how the

wind's backing round through the north? I can smell the east," and she sniffed with her nose well in the air. "We're in for a rain to-morrow, I do believe. It'll be just the day for you to write that letter you're going to send with the candy, and there's a number of matters you can help me about, and if you've got any mending to do maybe we'll find time to sit down together, and I'll relate that story about the Squire and me."

"Yes, indeed," said Polly as they marched up the driveway, "and I've got to practise with Mr. Hiram, you know. I expect it will be a grand day!"

CHAPTER XV

ARCTURA'S STORY

ARCTURA'S prediction came true, for the first sound Polly heard when she woke the next morning was a soft, steady patter on her window-pane; the trunk of the elm tree was wet and black, as if it had been raining all night. Polly was reminded of that stormy afternoon not quite two weeks ago when she had sat close to Uncle Blodgett in the old shed at Manser Farm and heard him tell about his brave young nephew who had gone to the war and died for his country.

"I wonder if they miss me," thought the little girl at Pomeroy Oaks. "Maybe they do, because they used to say I made all the noise there was in the house. It seems a pretty long time till next winter, but if I get real well acquainted with Miss Pomeroy so I can tell her that my loving the Manser Farm folks won't make me stop wanting to be like Eleanor, maybe she'll let

me go to see them by Thanksgiving. I wonder how my rag dolly likes it up in the garret in that tight box where Mrs. Manser put her. I expect she's lonesome, poor dolly. And Ebenezer I don't presume anybody gets down on the floor to play with him, because they've all got rheumatism except Mrs. Manser and she has pains in her head."

There was no trip to the village for Miss Pomeroy and Polly that morning. Toward noon Hiram drove off in the light wagon, holding a large umbrella over his head, and returned well splashed with mud an hour or so later.

Polly spent part of the morning in the library with Miss Pomeroy, darning some stockings and a rent in the old red frock. Miss Pomeroy had a book in her hands, but almost every time the little girl looked up from her work she found the keen gray eyes fixed on her face, and it made her uneasy. She thought there must be something unsatisfactory about her appearance, for her kind friend looked grave and troubled. Polly decided to speak.

"My hair isn't quite as flat as it is sometimes," she ventured after a long silence. "Mrs. Manser used to say that she believed Satan got into it

when the weather was damp, and perhaps he does. I suppose the nicest folks all have straight hair, don't they, Miss Pomeroy ? ”

The only answer was a smile and a stroke of the brown curls, and Polly was instantly confirmed in her opinion, while Miss Hetty's mind was far away.

“ But perhaps as I get more and more like Eleanor, my hair will change just as my cheeks are changing,” she thought hopefully. “ And I think I'm stretching out a little bit, too, practising the way Ebenezer did.”

The library was a delightful room, but the hour with Arctura before the kitchen fire in the afternoon had a different sort of charm for Polly.

“ You're so comfortable, Miss Arctura,” she said confidingly to Miss Green when they were fairly settled with their work. Polly's task was an iron-holder, and that of her hostess the flaming sock designed for Hiram's ample foot. Miss Pomeroy was in her room writing letters; she had many correspondents in the world outside the little town, and they kept her busy. Beside that she had a purpose in leaving Polly with the faithful Arctura a good deal of the time.

“ The child is happier with you, and I want

her to be happy," she said with perfect frankness. "She's a little afraid of me for some reason, and though it hurts my vanity, I don't want to hurry her confidence. I believe I shall win it in time."

"Of course you will," said Arctura stoutly. "I can't quite make her out sometimes. She'll seem real gay for a few minutes and then sober down all of a sudden, as if she remembered something. She's just as anxious to please you as ever a child could be. Do you suppose that Manser woman could have scared her anyway? Told her you were set on having her act any particular way, or anything?"

Miss Pomeroy's life had been singularly apart from the current of village gossip; she stared blankly at this suggestion and then shook her head.

"It wouldn't be possible," she said decidedly. "Mrs. Manser never spoke to me until I waylaid her after church that Sunday, three or four weeks ago. And there is nobody to tell her anything of me or my ways of living. She simply knows that I took a fancy to Mary, and—since yesterday—that I wish to adopt her."

"H—m," said Arctura softly, as Miss Pome-

roy turned away. "I shouldn't want to be too sure what folks know and what they don't, in any place where there's a post-office, two meat-men, and a baker's cart!"

"I've written my letter to go with the candy to-morrow morning," said Polly, as she basted a strip of Turkey red binding around a square of ticking after Miss Green's instructions. "It took me 'most an hour and a half by the big clock, and I made four blots and had to look in the dictionary three times, and now I expect it's just full of mistakes. I carried it to Miss Pomeroy but she said she wanted Auntie Peebles to have the first reading of it, and she helped me seal it with a great splotch of red sealing-wax, and mark it with her big stamp."

"Won't it mix 'em all up to see 'P' on the letter?" inquired Arctura. "Why no, what am I thinking of? 'P' stands for Prentiss just as well as Pomeroy."

"Yes, and for—for other names too," said Polly, remembering just in time. "Polly Perkins, that's in your song, it stands for both of her names."

"To be sure it does," said Arctura. Then the chairs rocked in silence for a few minutes.

Arctura stole a glance at the face so near hers. The little mouth was shut firmly, but there was a downward droop at the corners, and it certainly appeared to Arctura that something glistened in the long lashes that hid the great brown eyes.

"H'm—it's a kind of a dull day for little folks and big folks too," she said poking vigorously at the ashes in the grate with her back to Polly. "I don't know as there'll ever come a better time for me to tell you about the Squire and me when I was your age."

When she turned around the brown eyes were shining to match the eager voice and Arctura smiled with satisfaction.

"This occurred forty-five years ago," she began briskly. "I might as well break it to you that I'm all but fifty-five. I suppose you've met folks as old as that, haven't you?"

"Why, everybody at Manser Farm is ever and ever so much older except Mrs. Manser and Father Manser, and Bob Rust," said Polly earnestly. "They're all travelling on toward their end, Uncle Blodgett says, and he doesn't care how soon he gets his marching orders for the heavenly land; but I care," and the brown curls danced, "for I just love Uncle Blodgett!"

"I'm glad to hear it," said Arctura heartily. "Well, now, about the Squire and me. You see my mother—'marm' we all called her—was a notable cook. I don't approach her on pie crust nor muffins, and there was a sort of rye drop cake," said Miss Green lowering her voice, "that nobody but her could ever make. And she was a great one to invent cake receipts, and then invite folks in to take a dish of tea in the afternoon and test the new cake.

"The Squire's wife was a good deal younger than he—she'd only be seventy if she was alive to-day, while he was eighty-five when he died—and she'd often accept marm's invitations, and come to our old home—'twas burned years ago—and spend the best part of an afternoon just as friendly as you please. Not that 'twas any great come down, either," said Arctura with proper pride, "for my marm was of excellent stock, and I'm the first woman in the family records to work for pay.

"But that's nothing to do with the story. One morning when John and I were starting off for school—Hiram was only a baby—marm gave us each an errand to do on the way. I can remember I stood barefoot in the grass—what did you say?" as Polly made a sound.

"Nothing, but oh!" said Polly quickly. "I didn't mean to interrupt, Miss Arctura."

"Never mind, I'm glad to have you take an interest," said the story-teller. "I can remember standing there in the grass waiting for John, and saying over and over to myself, 'Please, Mrs. Pomeroy, marm sends her compliments and would like to have—no, that isn't right—Please, Mrs. Pomeroy, marm sends her compliments and would be happy to have you take tea with her this afternoon.'"

"Pretty soon John came running out and we took hold of hands and started for school. John said marm had told him to get an ounce of camphor at the store, and he was wishing she'd said a pound instead of such a stingy little mite, and I had to set forth to him how much an ounce of camphor could do before he was anyway reconciled.

"We had nearly two miles to go to school, and that morning when we got to the fork in the roads I ran across lots to get here quicker, and John went on down to the store. It was way out at the corners, not where the Burcham Block is now," explained Arctura. "Folks expected the village would grow this way, but it went the other.

"I ran to the front door, as marm had charged me to, and reached up for the knocker and gave it a good bang. And what should I see but the Squire, instead of Mrs. Pomeroy that I was prepared for! He was tall and stern looking, and my ideas just fled away when I saw him, but I managed to remember my manners. I dropped a curtsy and said, 'Please, marm wants Mrs. Pomeroy's tea, and she'd be happy to have her compliments this afternoon.'

"Then it came over me what I'd said, and with being scared and all I began to cry. And the Squire just reached down and took my hand and led me into the house, and Mrs. Pomeroy understood the message right off, and said she'd be most happy to come. The Squire kept hold of my hand all the time, and when the message was straightened out, he said, 'May I walk with you as far as our ways lie together, my little maid?'"

"Oh, wasn't that beautiful!" cried Polly. "'May I walk with you as far as our ways lie together, my little maid?' That's something like Mr. Shakespeare's works that Uncle Blodgett has!"

"'Twas pretty fine talk, I think myself," said

Miss Green, "and 'twas followed up by finer, though I can't recall anything else word for word. But we kept together hand in hand, he taking long strides and I running alongside, as you might say, till we reached a house where the Squire had to stop. He took off his hat to me when he said good-by and shook my hand, and said 'I beg you to accept this trifling remembrance, my little maid,' and when I came to, there was a shining gold piece in my hand!"

"'I beg you to accept this trifling remembrance, my little maid,'" repeated Polly. "I think that's even beautifuller than what he said at first. I guess Uncle Blodgett and Grandma Manser too, would like to hear that. They love beautiful language!"

"When I got to school," continued Arctura after an appreciative smile at Polly, "John was in the middle of a group of children on the green. He'd taken off his coat and was showing 'em his first pair of 'galluses'—bright red, they were, about the shade of this very yarn. One of the children ran up to me, and said, 'I suppose your brother John thinks he's a man now, for he says his suspenders are just like your father's.'"

"I never answered her, but I just opened out

my palm to let her see the gold piece, and I said, 'The Squire walked with me way to Mrs. Brown's, and gave me this!'

"John had considerable interest for the boys that day, but the girls were all taken up with me, and for weeks afterward when we got tired playing, somebody'd say, 'Arctura, now you tell about your marm's message, and the Squire walking part way to school with you.'"

"Oh, I think it was ever so much more interesting than John's suspenders," said Polly breathlessly. "I never heard anything so wonderful that happened to a little girl, Miss Arctura!"

Miss Green loosened the ruffle at her neck and slowly drew up a slender chain on the end of which something dangled.

"Suspenders wear out, even the best of 'em," she said softly leaning toward her little guest. "You look at that. My father boared a hole in it, and marm gave me the chain that was her marm's, and I've worn it from that day to this."

"And mind you," said Miss Green as Polly looked with awe at the little gold piece, kept shining by Arctura's loving care, "whenever the Squire was a mite cross or unreasonable those last years, from his mind getting tangled, I'd put

my hand over this little dangling thing, and I'd say to myself, 'Arctura Green, who gave you the proudest day you ever knew as a little girl?' and 'twould warm my heart up in a minute! There's some that forgets, but with all my faults, I ain't one of the number!"

CHAPTER XVI

POLLY'S LETTER

WHEN Father Manser returned from his trip to the post-office the next evening he found the residents at Manser Farm, with the exception of his melancholy spouse, gathered in the kitchen. Mrs. Manser had gone to bed with a headache, but her absence failed to cast a gloom over the company. It was the most cheerful evening that had been known since Polly left them, for Uncle Blodgett had not only read the weekly "Sentinel" in so clear a tone that even Grandma Manser, near whom he sat, could hear, but he had, after urging, recited several poems.

"I admire to hear battle-pieces," said Aunty Peebles, just as the doors wung open to admit Father Manser. "When you spoke that 'Charge of the Light Brigade,' it gave me chills all along my spine, and made me feel as if I could step right forth to war."

"I expect you wouldn't be a very murderous character, though, come to get you on the field

of battle," said Uncle Blodgett good-naturedly. "Now there's Mis' Ramsdell, I reckon she'd make a good fighter if she was put to it."

"I come of war stock," said Mrs. Ramsdell, her black eyes snapping and nostrils dilating as she acknowledged the compliment. "My father and his three brothers were in the war of 1812, and back of that their parents and uncles were in the thick of '76, and led wherever they were."

"Aren't you kind of reckless, speaking of 'parents' that way?" inquired Uncle Blodgett. "Did your grandmarm conduct a regiment, or what was her part in the proceedings?"

Mrs. Ramsdell directed a look of withering scorn at her old friend, but her eye caught sight of a package in Father Manser's hand and she was suddenly alert.

"What you got there?" she demanded, and at once all the old heads turned toward the newcomer.

Usually they took no special note of Father Manser's return, as there were scarcely ever any letters, and they well knew the paper must be Mrs. Manser's spoil for the evening.

"It's a box," said Father Manser, turning the package over and over in his hand.

"We can all see that," said Mrs. Ramsdell sharply.

"And it seems to be directed to Miss Anne Peebles," proceeded Father Manser, taking no offence.

Aunty Peebles began to tremble with excitement as the box was handed to her, and a flush rose in the other old faces as the group closed in around the table, so that the lamp might shed its light on this surprising package.

"If you could wait till I've taken the paper in to Mrs. Manser, I've got a sharp knife that would cut those fastenings," said Father Manser wistfully. "Her door's closed, and I won't be but a minute. I won't speak of the package, and I'll mention that the fire needs more wood, for I see it does."

"I'll wait," said Aunty Peebles, and spurred by a "Hurry up then, for goodness' sake!" from Mrs. Ramsdell, Father Manser sped off with the paper.

"It's Polly's writing," said Uncle Blodgett after a long squint at the address on the brown paper covering of the box. "I've got one of her exercises that the teacher said she might keep, one of that last batch, if I haven't lost it."

Uncle Blodgett drew from his coat pocket a long flat wallet, and took out of it a piece of paper carefully creased and bearing evidences of frequent handling. He spread it out close to the box, so that all might see.

"You mark that cross on the T," he said triumphantly. "She begins it with a kind of a hook, different from most that you'd see. I—I noticed it the day she made me a gift of the paper," said Uncle Blodgett, as he replaced his treasure in the wallet.

"The box is from Polly Prentiss," cried Mrs. Ramsdell in Grandma Manser's ear. "I guess your daughter-in-law's made a mistake about her forgetting us, after all." Then the old lady put her arms through Grandma Manser's and pressed her fiercely, as if to make amends for this reference to the doubting one. "'Taint as if she was your daughter, dear heart," she said remorsefully.

When the string had at last given way—Father Manser had slashed it recklessly in half-a-dozen places in his haste—and the box cover was lifted, there lay the letter on which Polly had spent so much time and thought, with seven chocolate drops on it. Auntie Peebles passed the box around and each of the company took a piece of candy;

even Bob Rust had his portion, which he carried to his favorite seat near the door into the shed, and handled as if it were something rare and wonderful, as indeed it was to him.

Father Manser set his wife's piece carefully aside. Nobody failed for a moment to understand little Polly's loving thought for them all. Below the letter lay row after row of the chocolates, but they could wait.

"Now we've—ahem!—eaten part of the message," said Uncle Blodgett gruffly, "suppose you read us the rest of it, Miss Peebles. Seems to be some time since we've heard direct from the child."

Aunty Peebles's voice quavered many times during the reading, and there was a frank use of handkerchiefs at some points, but the interest in Polly's letter never flagged.

"Dear Folks at Manser Farm," read Aunty Peebles, "this is a beautiful place and every one is very kind to me. How do you all do, and is Ebyneezer well and the other Animals? The minister came to dinner Sunday, that was why I was so late and you had gone, but I heard the Wagon up the hill. This is a beautiful place,

with big trees, and in the house there are books and books and Cabbynets with kurous Shells and other things. And there is silver that shines, and my bed and chairs are white with a pink Strype. Mrs. Manser, I am being careful of my Close and I allways wear an apron. There are two little kittens here. Their names are Snip and Snap.

“When folks have such a beautiful place I guess they do not care much about going out-doors, but there is a Pyaza and I walk on that a great deal, beside I have been to walk down the road most every day with Miss Pomeroy and she is just as good to me! And once I have been in the Woods with Miss Arctura and she said ‘next time,’ so that means we are going again. Mr. Hiram that is her brother can resite pieces and he is teaching me On Linden when the Sun was Low, Uncle Blodgett do you know that piece? He says he would give all his boot buttons to hear you resite Mr. Shakespeer’s Works. I do not think I have spelled that name right. Perhaps I can see you all before Christmas, but perhaps I cannot, for I am going to be adopted. Do you miss me, Grandma Manser and Mrs. Ramsdell? Do you miss me Uncle Blodgett? and Aunty Peebles do you miss me? This is a beautiful

place, and I read and sew and play with the kittens and Miss Pomeroy says I am a quiet little girl, Mrs. Manser. Father Manser do you remember giving me Pepermints? I hope you will all like this Candy. I have been to the Village once with Miss Pomeroy, but I did not see any folks I knew.

"I hope Grandma Manser will have her ear Trumpet pretty soon. Aunty Peebles I love that Cushion and I look at it very many times, and Uncle Blodgett Mr. Hiram will have that knife fixed for a Present he says. Now I must say Good-by with heaps and heaps of love. I put Aunty Peebles's name on this, because she admires to get things through the Post-Office.

MARY PRENTISS.

"Miss Pomeroy is not going to look at this. I am trying to be just like Ellynor, but I expect I am not. Will you please call me Polly to yourselves? Nobody here knows it ever was my name."

The last few lines were evidently written in great haste. Polly had run up-stairs to add them when she found the letter would not be inspected.

There was a short silence when the last word had been read. Mrs. Ramsdell fidgetted in her chair.

"She seems to be real contented and happy, doesn't she?" said Father Manser, looking from one to another for confirmation of his views. "I guess they're mighty kind to her."

"Kind! who wouldn't be to that darling little thing, I'd like to know?" snapped Mrs. Ramsdell. "But she's grieving for all the folks she's been used to, and trying not to let anybody know it. It isn't that we're such remarkable folks, but it's because she's such a loving little thing; that's the reason of it."

"What do they mean by keeping her housed up so?" demanded Uncle Blodgett sternly. "They'll have her sick of a fever next thing we know! Out doors has been the breath of her living and her joy! I guess what those folks need is somebody to make a few points clear to 'em. What was this Eleanor the child talks of, that she should be set up for a pattern? Wa'n't she mortal like all the rest of us?"

"Mrs. Manser says Miss Pomeroy thought she was perfection," ventured Father Manser as nobody else seemed prepared with an answer. "She

used to talk with Polly about her, every day before she went, advising her what she'd better do Mrs. Manser did."

"I'll warrant she did," said Uncle Blodgett bitterly. "That's the whole root of the trouble. Now you mark my words, all of you women folks"—Uncle Blodgett evidently included poor Father Manser in his summing up—"I'm going to have speech with that Pomeroy woman before many days have gone over my head, and I'm going to set a few things straight. As for having that child carry the weight of this whole establishment, leaks, ear-trumpets, shingles and all on her mind, and try to live up to nobody knows what, I won't stand it!"

"What do you plan?" asked Mrs. Ramsdell with unwonted respect.

"I shall fare down to the village with Father here," said Uncle Blodgett, indicating the object of his choice by a careless nod, "and if she doesn't happen to drive in that morning, I shall foot it to Pomeroy Oaks. My legs are good for a little matter of three miles or so."

"It's a good four miles as I remember it," muttered Mrs. Ramsdell.

"Well, call it four then," roared Uncle Blod-

gett in a sudden fury. "Call it five or six or ten if you've a mind! My legs are good for it, I tell ye! And if I have to foot it there," he added turning quickly on poor Father Manser, "you may say to your wife I've gone a-visiting an old friend for the afternoon. If Polly Prentiss ain't an old friend I haven't got one in this world!"

Uncle Blodgett sat heavily down in his chair, exhausted by his unwonted outbreak, but Mrs. Ramsdell stepped over to him and held out her hand.

"If I were five years younger," said the old lady whose age nobody knew, "I'd put on my bonnet and shawl and foot it with you!"

CHAPTER XVII

IN THE BARN

WHILE the old people at Ashdon poor-farm were reading Polly's letter the little girl herself was listening with a sober face to a piece of news which had come to Miss Pomeroy. It was eight o'clock—past Polly's bed-time—but she was so anxious to finish the wonderful story of the Snow Queen that Miss Hetty had offered to read the last pages aloud. She had reached the end only a moment before Hiram brought the mail.

"Bobby—my little nephew—is coming here to spend Sunday on his way to see another aunt, his mother's sister," said Miss Pomeroy looking up from her letter to Polly who stood waiting to say good-night. "I'm very glad, Mary, for I am sure you two children will enjoy each other, you are both so quiet and fond of books. Perhaps we can persuade Bobby to make us a longer visit on the way home."

That night and the next morning Polly stretched in Ebenezer's fashion until her little

arms and legs ached. She made up her mind that she would lose no opportunity for the next three days of performing this gymnastic exercise or of hurrying on her growing likeness to Eleanor in other ways.

She sat for hours with Miss Pomeroy, sewing patchwork and listening to stories of the old curiosities in the Indian cabinet that stood in the parlor. They were interesting stories, but the room was kept very warm because of Miss Hetty's rheumatism which was troublesome just then, and Polly's head grew hot and tired as she sat quietly in the little chair at Miss Pomeroy's side. She ate as much as she possibly could at every meal, and she did not speak of going out to walk in the afternoons after her hour on the bed.

"I shall be glad when I get over this stiffness, so we may have our walks together again," said Miss Pomeroy when Friday night came. "I'm afraid if it were not for me, Mary, you would not have enough out-door air. But I am glad you are so contented in the house, for it is very pleasant to have a little companion while I am obliged to keep still so much of the time."

Polly smiled affectionately at her, but the little girl's heart was heavy. She was listless

in her movements except when under someone's eye, and felt a strange indifference to the things which had always delighted her.

"I guess I'm getting just exactly like Eleanor in some ways," she said to herself many times a day. "The brook calls and calls me just the way it did at first, but my legs feel so queer and my head is so funny, I don't seem to care so much about paddling in the water now. Miss Arctura says it is too cold in the woods yet, anyway. She says her brother John's wife caught her death once, neglecting to use her judgment when a cold spell came in April. Oh dear, I wish Bobby had been here and gone away! S'posing he doesn't 'prove of me? Wouldn't that be dreadful!"

Hiram was Polly's stay and comfort in this trying time. Arctura—the truth must be told—had suffered more or less from a grumbling toothache ever since her afternoon in the woods. Arctura objected to going to the dentist "on principle" she said, though Miss Pomeroy had never been able to understand just what she meant by that. Hiram was the only person who ventured to brook the subject to his sister and his advice was sharply scorned.

"Don't you think you'd ought to have that tooth pulled, Tura?" Hiram had mildly asked as he washed his hands at the noon hour on Thursday, and Miss Green had turned upon him with swift contempt.

"Better have my legs removed next time they get a mite overtired and ache a little, hadn't I?" she said severely. "Go and have all your own teeth out whenever you want, but just leave mine alone, if you please!"

Polly had overheard this dialogue as she entered the kitchen on an errand, and she could hardly believe her ears.

"But 'Tura'll be all right soon as the weather warms up again," Hiram had explained to Polly in the barn at milking-time. "She ain't been quite herself the last day or two; toothache appears to upset her more than anything else in this world. I saw her grinding her jaws together yesterday morning, and I knew 'twas that old left hand wisdom of hers at it again. She's got a roasted raisin in it now, I know by the way she mumbled at me when I went in for the milk-pail, but I dursn't refer to it. We'll just step kind of easy for the next twenty-four hours

and it'll be all clear weather again. She hasn't got any real malice in her, 'Tura hasn't."

"I think she's just as kind as she can be," said Polly warmly. But it was a sober little face at which Hiram smiled broadly down when he rose from the milking stool.

"You stay here while I take this in," he said cheerily, "and I'll fetch out a lantern so we can run through 'On Linden' far as we've gone. You said old Marm Hackett was with Miss Hetty, I believe?"

"Yes," said Polly, "and she told me to run out for awhile as she had something to lay before Miss Pomeroy. Do you think she's a very pleasant old lady, Mr. Hiram?"

"Well now, let's see if I've ever heard anybody speak of her that way," said Hiram cautiously. "I guess I'd better consider it while I'm carrying off the milk."

Polly knew that his opinion agreed with hers, and she gave a little laugh as he swung out of the barn with the pail of milk. When he returned with the lantern she was standing in the middle of the barn floor and made a sweeping curtsey to him as he entered.

"That's good," said Hiram, setting down the

lantern and seating himself on the lowest stair of the flight that led up to the loft. "That's first-rate. How would it be if you should make two of 'em—one to the left and one to the right? In case folks were seated promiscuous—that is here and there," explained Hiram, "it would be fair to all parties. That's it—that's the way to do it!" and he clapped his hands as Polly greeted an imaginary audience. "Nobody's going to feel left out with that beginning. Now for it."

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Polly with a wide sweep of her arms, "the piece that I am about to speak to you, is 'Hohenlinden' by Mr. Thomas Campbell."

"Little louder, if you please," said Hiram in a disguised voice, "there's a couple of old ladies at the rear that don't want to miss a word."

"'On Linden, when the sun was low,'" said Polly in a clear, loud voice—and as she spoke she stooped and indicated the position of the sun with her right hand—

"'All bloodless lay the untrodden snow
And dark as winter was the flow
Of Iser, rolling rapidly :'"

The rapidity of Iser's flow was shown by Polly's two little arms which swung back and forth

from her shoulders as fast as she could possibly move them.

"That's prime!" said Hiram approvingly. "Seems as if I could see old Iser right before me. Now the next verse."

"But Linden saw another sight,"

said Polly flushed with pleasure, shielding her eyes with her hand and gazing anxiously about the barn.

"First-rate!" cried her instructor. "I tell you, little Mary, you've got the real spirit for reciting! Now that gesture had never come into my mind, and yet there 'tis fitting in complete. I make no doubt Linden folks were out looking just that way, bound to see, yet scared of what would meet 'em. Now for the drums!"

"When the drum beat at dead of night,"

said Polly, valiantly belaboring her right palm with the clenched fingers of her left hand.

"Commanding fires of death to light
The darkness of her scenery."

"There's not a bit of fault to be found with that," said Hiram as he received the lantern from the hands of his pupil who had seized it and swung it wildly about when the "fires of death" were

lighting. "Of course the lantern will be behind you the night of the entertainment, ready for use."

"Of course," said Polly. "Now comes the best verse of all, I think, Mr. Hiram.

'By torch and trumpet fast arrayed'--

I shall have a candle and the tin horn that night, you know--

'Each horseman drew his battle-blade'--"

Uncle Blodgett's gift was drawn with a fierce flourish--

"'And furious every charger neighed,
'To join the dreadful revelry.'"

The verse ended with an indescribable sound and Hiram drew his hand across his mouth before he spoke in answer to Polly's questioning eyes.

"I call that a pretty fair neigh," he said encouragingly. "I don't know as I'd go so far as to say 'twould deceive anybody into thinking there was a horse right on the spot, but it's improving in its quality all the time, I notice."

"I'm so glad," said Polly, "because you see I can't make the roars and other noises for the 'dreadful revelry' the way you can, and I wanted to do something."

The next two verses finished Polly's recitation for that evening. Hiram had promised to assist with "the hills with thunder riven" and the "red artillery." The thunder was to be made with a pair of wooden dumbbells, and the 'red artillery' was a little old lantern with a red glass front which would dart about Polly's figure in Mr. Green's hand.

"That was an extra good rehearsal" said he, as the little girl sat down beside him on the stairs.

"Now we'll learn the next verse, shall we, and call it we've finished for the night?"

When the next lines with their "furious Frank and fiery Hun" were pronounced perfect, Polly begged for a story.

"Just a little bit of a short one, Mr. Hiram, before I go to bed," she said coaxingly, "and I don't care whether it's true or not."

"That being the case," said Hiram soberly as they sat close together with the lantern at their feet, "I'll relate a little circumstance that a man once told me. It'll give you something to think about, but I shouldn't want to say how true 'tis, for it seems a mite improbable. This man said that a friend of his out West somewhere had always had trouble with the chimney in his parlor,

I would say with the draught of it up from the fireplace. He had it tinkered off an' on for years, and finally he decided he'd have the old contraption torn down and a bran' new chimney put up.

"Someway the mason made a mistake and got the new chimney on wrongside up, and the draught was a powerful one, and first they knew rain, hail, snow and what-all were drawed right down into the room, making dreadful work.

"They sent for the mason, of course, and he took the chimney down and put it on again right side up, and then the draught was so powerful that it drawed a braided rug and a pair o' tongs and a three-legged stool and a number of other articles right up the chimney.

"Then they saw something had got to be done, so they put a poultice—a flour poultice I understood him to say—on the jamb of the fireplace, and that drawed down so it balanced and counteracted the draught, and after that the chimney gave perfect satisfaction."

Polly had stared at the narrator when he began the story, but as he progressed she covered her mouth with both hands for fear she should laugh out and interrupt him.

"Mr. Hiram," she cried as the story teller rose, chuckling, and began to close the barn for the night, "next to Mr. Hans Christian Anderson's I would rather hear your make-believe circumstances than anybody's that ever I heard!"

"Compliment number two," said Hiram as they stepped out of the barn side by side. "You'd better be looking sharp or you'll have me all stuffed out with pride before you know it, young lady!"

CHAPTER XVIII

A DREADED VISITOR

NOBODY but the kittens knew that Polly dreaded the coming of Eleanor's twin. She told them all about it Saturday morning as they sat in her lap cuddled into a warm heap under the gray shawl that Arctura had wrapped about her.

Arctura's tooth had not quite stopped its grumbling and she had firmly declined Polly's aid in the kitchen that morning.

"I've got some bothersome cooking to do," said Arctura without the smile which might let in a draught of air on the convalescent jaw, "and I'd best be alone, for my nerves are sort of jumpy along with a pain I've been enduring in my head without speaking of it, for some days. The air's mild enough for you to set out on the piazza and watch for Miss Hetty and Bobbly, if I wrap you up well. It's getting ready to rain again to-morrow, and then I have hopes of some fair warm weather when it clears off finally."

Miss Pomeroy's rheumatism was much less

troublesome than it had been for some days, and Hiram had helped her into the low, basket phaeton an hour before.

"I expect she's 'most home now," said Polly to the kittens with a little shiver, "and she's bringing that boy—that Bobby—home with her. He's going to stay till Monday morning. You needn't be frightened, Snip and Snap, for he's a boy that just likes to read; he wouldn't do the things to kitties that the Higgins boys do—things with strings and spools, till the teacher stopped them. And anyway you've got lots of places to hide, where nobody could get you. But I can't hide. I'm obliged to be right out where he can see me, and tell whether I'm like his sister Eleanor that died, and maybe change Miss Pomeroy's mind after all, and lose Grandma Manser her ear-trumpet, and the money for the leaks and shingles and everything!"

Polly buried her face in the old shawl for a minute, and then sat up straight with a little gasp.

"I hear the phaeton!" she whispered, squeezing the kittens in her excitement. "I hear it coming over the bridge—fast!"

Snip and Snap objected to squeezing. They

struggled under the shawl and dashed out over Polly's knees, clutching wildly at the fringe. They looked up at her cannily with arched backs and then scurried off toward the barn.

As the phaeton came around the curve of the driveway, Polly stood up, clasping her hands under the old shawl. She heard Arctura bustling out of the kitchen to the porch, and moved slowly along to stand beside her. In a moment more she found herself solemnly shaking hands with a boy who had jumped from the phaeton and then politely helped Miss Pomeroy out.

"This is my nephew Bobby," Miss Hetty was saying. "And this is little Mary Prentiss."

"I am very pleased to make your acquaintance," said Polly, lifting her brown eyes to meet a pair of very large blue ones which gazed at her through spectacles.

"How d' you do?" said the boy pleasantly. "Haven't you got about through with my hand?"

He laughed as he said it and so did Polly, but, when the hand-shaking stopped they stood looking at each other awkwardly until Arctura broke the ice.

"You two children step out to the dining-room

while Miss Hetty goes and rests after her ride," said Arctura cordially. "I've set a tray with two tumblers of milk and some crullers on the buffet, and you can stand up and eat on to it, so's not to scatter the crumbs. I never saw the time a boy wasn't ready to eat, and Mary here's got a most, excellent appetite of her own. Dinner won't be for nearly two hours yet."

"Thank you," cried Bobby. "You're a trump!"

"Seems to me you've thickened up a little since last time," said Miss Green cautiously guarding the entrance to the cavern wherein dwelt her wisdom tooth, as she acknowledged this commendation. "I suppose you'll drop into the kitchen along in the afternoon while Miss Hetty and Mary are taking their naps? I don't see my way clear to sitting down at dinner for a talk with you, for I've been having a little neuralgy and the air in the dining-room seems kind of chilly after the kitchen."

"Do you take a nap every day?" asked Bobby curiously as he and Polly drank their milk and ate the crisp crullers. "I s'pose girls like to do that kind of thing, but I'd rather read all night than waste time sleeping in the daylight. I've

never known any girls very well except my sister. I'm afraid of them, they're so queer."

"Oh, they're not half as queer as boys, I'm sure!" asserted Polly with much decision. "I guess if you knew the Higgins boys that I've been to school with, you'd say so. I never could get those boys to play house with me once! They said it wasn't any fun."

"Well 'tish't, you know," said Bobby without a moment's hesitation. "Of course nothing happens when you play house, no adventures—no accidents—no anything."

"No accidents!" echoed Polly in amazement. "I should think it was a pretty dreadful accident to invite four dolls to tea—(cut out of a newspaper, they were, beautiful ones, Uncle Blodgett did them for me)—and find you had burned up every biscuit to a crisp while you were setting the table, I mean they had burned themselves up! Don't you like to play any make-believes?"

"Yes, I like some," admitted the boy frankly, "but you wouldn't like my kind, and I call yours pretty slow."

"What kind of make-believes do you like best?" asked Polly as she and the dreaded guest sat together in the library at dusk. Miss Pomeroy was

entertaining Marm Hackett in the parlor, much to the old woman's rage, she having desired a talk with the new-comer for whom she had prepared a list of searching questions.

"I like the kind of make-believes that are in books," said the boy, staring into the fire. He sat on the hearth-rug with his legs crossed in a position of tantalizing comfort. Polly sat in a straight-backed chair and viewed him with envy. She would have like so much to be beside him on the rug with her hands clasped over her knees and her chin resting on them. And he had not felt obliged to take any nap. She had heard him talking to Arctura while she lay on that hot bed.

"'Treasure Island' is a mighty good make-believe" remarked Bobby after a short silence. "I shouldn't have had any objections to living that story right along."

"I've never read it," said Polly with a little sigh. "I've never read much of anything till now. Is 'Treasure Island' as beautiful as the 'Snow Queen'?" she asked doubtfully. "It doesn't seem as if it could be."

"Beautiful isn't the word for it," replied Bobby, turning his spectacled eyes toward her for a moment. "It's wild, and murderous in places, and

it carries you along with it. So does 'Kidnapped.' That's what you want of a book. I never can make up my mind whether I'd rather have been David Balfour or Napoleon. If I had my choice I believe I'd have to draw lots."

"There are places in the woods where Miss Arctura and I went one day that would be splendid for make-believes, I should think," ventured Polly, anxious to please this remarkable boy. "There are rocks that you could hide behind and jump out at me. I shouldn't be a bit afraid—truly I shouldn't!"

"We'll see," said Bobby, "only to-morrow's Sunday you know, and of course we have to go to church—and anyway I couldn't be as fierce about it as if you were a boy. I couldn't knock a girl over, or pitch into her and wrest her sword from her grasp. That's where the fun comes in."

"I thought they said you didn't care much about play," said Polly, much surprised.

"I don't care for a ball, or marbles or any of those things," said Bobby scornfully. "I'd rather read any day. But there's a fellow at home, George Rogers, —just twelve, my age, you know,—and he and I play a robber band piece that we've made out of different books. I can

tell you it's worth seeing. Only I suppose 'twould scare a girl blue."

"It would not scare me blue," said Polly, shaking her curls. "I should like it!"

"Eleanor never minded it," said the boy softly to himself, but Polly heard him, and her heart beat high with hope as he took off his spectacles, rubbed them for a minute with a big, white handkerchief and then adjusted them carefully to his nose as Uncle Blodgett always did when preparing to read the newspaper.

"Perhaps he'll think I'm something like Eleanor after all," said Polly in her heart. She hesitated for a moment and then leaned over until her head was almost against the boy's shoulder, as he sat gazing into the fire.

"Do you like 'Mary' for a name?" she asked, scarcely breathing the words.

"Why yes, I don't know but I do," said the boy turning to face her. "But what are you whispering for? I can tell you what I don't like—I despise Bobby for a name! It's just like baby talk—but I'm afraid of hurting Aunt Hetty's feelings if I say anything about it. Next time she comes over to our house, I'm going to get grandfather just to suggest to her that it's

time to give up nicknames when a boy's all but in his teens. He can do it all right. Maybe she'll bring you over. I'd like to show you George Rogers, and we could do our act for you."

"Perhaps I shall be in school then," said Polly, feeling highly honored by this invitation, "there are only two weeks more vacation."

"You're not going to school next term," said Bobby. "I know, for Aunt Hetty told me. She wants to get you more 'chippered up' Arctura says. Isn't Arctura an old dear? Did she ever tell you what the children used to sing about her nose when she was a young one? It's funny, and she says she never minded, but I'd have soon stopped them if I'd been there."

"She never told me," said Polly with a glance of admiration at the boy who spoke so valiantly while he looked so mild, "I'd like to hear it."

"Her nose is pretty prominent, of course," said the heir of the Pomeroy's reluctantly, "and she says it got its growth before the rest of her. And when they'd see her coming they'd sing out,

" ' Hark ! Hark !
Tura's bark !
S'pose her nose
Came out o' the Ark.' "

"How mean!" cried Polly indignantly.

"That's what I say, but she laughed like everything when she told me about it," said the boy. "She says her voice was hoarse and queer because she was always having coughs and colds. She seemed to think it was a good joke."

"That's because she's so good-natured," said little Polly.

"I say, let's act a charade to-night and make Aunt Hetty guess it," said the boy after staring at the old andirons in silence for a few minutes. "I know a fine one that I've just thought up, and I'll tell you how to do your part. George Rogers and I are always making them up, and then our families try to guess them."

Polly assented with mingled joy and fear. Bobby pressed Arctura into his service to collect materials for this impromptu entertainment and at seven o'clock Miss Pomeroy sat in the library, waiting for the first syllable. The door that led into the little porch hall was open and Arctura and Hiram were seated side by side just over the threshold of the dining-room.

"I don't want to sit in the library along with your aunt, for it gets het up so with that fire," Miss Green had explained to the actors. "Hiram

and I will sit outside where we can see all and yet keep comfortable."

The children had exchanged a glance of perfect understanding and some amusement, but loyalty to the faithful Arctura kept them silent.

A moment after the tall clock had given its seven silvery strokes, the door into the front hall burst open and in rushed a strange figure. He was wrapped in a blanket with a bright red border, tied about the waist with a blue and green plaid shawl. In this belt were two carving knives and a hammer. A feather-duster waved above the boy's head, its handle imparting a peculiar stiffness to the action of his neck. A brown calico mask, through which his spectacles glittered alarmingly, was drawn over his face. In each hand was an old hatchet.

"Never you fear, Miss Hetty," came Arctura's voice from the porch hall as this extraordinary figure began to caper about the room, uttering discordant yells and brandishing the hatchets, "there isn't a weapon in his outfit that could cut a string. Mercy on us, keep away from me!" she shrieked as the calico mask turned in her direction.

Presently Polly appeared with a little basket on her arm, walking along with eyes cast down. There was a wild whoop from the figure in the blanket, a shrill cry from Polly, and the two rushed from the room, leaving the audience to reflect upon what they had seen.

“Looked like murder to me,” said Hiram, chuckling. “but I suppose that ain’t the answer.” Just then Bobby stuck his head in the door.

“We think it’s only fair to you,” he said, bowing to his aunt and casting a glance beyond her into the darkness where sat the Greens, “to tell you that there were three syllables to the first act—there’ll be two to this next one—and one to the last.”

“Three syllables—that settles it—murder’s only got two,” remarked Hiram solemnly. “Well, I’ve guessed wrong the first time. Got any light on it, Miss Hetty?”

“I’m not sure, of course, Hiram,” said Miss Pomeroy with a laugh, “but I have the glimmer of an idea.”

Hiram’s chuckle ended abruptly as the door opened to admit Polly bearing a slate on which was drawn an irregular shaped object, from the

top of which a long line curved off to one edge of the slate.

"I call that a pincushion," said Hiram meditatively, "or else a balloon. I don't know which. It's first-rate for either one."

"It isn't," said Polly, then she blushed, shook her head and ran out of the room, to be received by her partner in the hall with a good deal of reproach.

"I seem to be sinking in deeper every time," said Hiram in a loud voice, intended to reach the other hall. "Murder—cushion is the nearest I've come."

"In this next scene you've got to pretend you're all English," said the boy, pausing on the threshold before he and Polly entered, "for that's the only way we can make it come out right."

"Pretty short notice for a man that's never been thirty miles from home," said Mr. Green in a melancholy tone.

The actors paid no heed to him. Polly put her little right hand to her ear and assumed a listening attitude, while the boy fell prone upon his stomach and raising his head, began to squirm over the floor making a strange sound suggestive of tightly shut teeth and breath drawn in and let

out with all possible force. At last he squirmed out of the door, followed by the listening Polly.

There was the sound of animated dialogue in the hall, and then just as Hiram had made the doleful announcement that all was lost as far as his guessing was concerned, in came the boy and girl, hand in hand.

"We can't do the whole word," announced Bobby "for we've decided we don't either of us draw well enough. But all I can say is, it's on the map. Now have you guessed? You have, Aunt Hetty, I know you have!"

"I'm not at all certain," said Miss Pomeroy cautiously. "Could it be—Indianapolis?"

"I knew you'd guess," said the boy delightedly. "Wasn't it pretty good? Indian—apple—'iss. 'Twas her idea thinking of dropping the h off hiss, because her Uncle Blodgett told her once that was the way English people talked." He looked with appreciation at Polly as he gave this generous tribute. "Wasn't it bright of her?"

"I move we clap the whole company," said Hiram—and the entertainment closed in a burst of applause, while the two actors made their very best bows to the audience.

CHAPTER XIX

POLLY'S LAST STRAW

POLLY stood at her window the next morning before breakfast looking out at the rain which seemed to gush from the clouds "just the way it comes out of the pump," said the little girl disconsolately. Polly's figure drooped more and more and her lips had a sorrowful curve as she watched the rain.

"It seems as if everything was wet enough," she said wistfully. "I don't believe I like April so very much. We can't go to church and I sha'n't see my Manser Farm folks. Oh dear! I'm just as lonesome! I don't suppose I'll ever dare tell Miss Pomeroy how I keep thinking about Grandma Manser and Aunty Peebles and the rest of the folks. And I do want my old dolly so! I don't see why a dolly is any worse than Indian-apple-'iss. I don't truly! And I'm tired trying to be like Eleanor, I'm as tired as I can be. And I don't believe I've stretched very

much, and my legs ache. I don't believe little girls stretch as easy as cats. Oh dear! I can't cry, for if my eyes are red they'd ask me what the matter was. And they're just as good to me! But I haven't got anybody I belong to, here; I've got to call everybody Miss and Mister. Oh dear!"

Polly went over to the table on which lay her treasures; she kissed the old knife and the little pincushion tenderly and patted them as she put them back in their places. Then she went slowly down-stairs to eat her breakfast.

It was a long day for the little girl. Bobby curled himself up in a big chair and forgot all about her as he wandered through Africa with Livingstone, turning page after page with his eyes fastened on the printed words. Polly chose a Sunday book and tried to read it, but the little heroine of the story was so discouragingly good that it was less depressing to watch the rain. So Polly shared the window seats with Snip and Snap and occasionally whispered confidences in their furry ears.

Miss Pomeroy sat in her own room most of the day, feeling sure that the children were enjoying themselves, after their own fashion, and

not wishing to be a check upon them in any way. She noticed that Polly did not eat as much dinner as usual, and laid her hand kindly on the little girl's shoulder as they left the dining-room.

"I'm afraid you are not quite well, Mary," she said. "You would better take a good rest and a nap now, and get to bed early to-night. Bobby has his book to amuse him, and your cheeks look flushed. Cover yourself up warm, my dear, and you'll go right off to sleep."

"She's a bright little thing, isn't she?" said the boy to his aunt as Polly went slowly upstairs, "but I never imagined a girl could be so quiet and—and serious, and old for her age. She doesn't seem to care for dolls or girls' games a bit. She did speak about playing house, when we were talking yesterday, but afterward I judged from something she said that she liked that because she's fond of cooking."

"She's a great help to Arctura," said Miss Pomeroy, "but she certainly stays in the house too much. I haven't wanted to urge her to do anything she wasn't used to, until she felt more at home, but when you stop for the little visit on your way back I hope the weather will be so

that you children can stay out of doors most of the time. You can take a book of course," and she pinched the boy's ear affectionately.

"I'll wake her up," said Bobby with confidence, "she needs it. She's too quiet, that's a fact."

Hiram was to drive the boy to the station early Monday morning. The children shook hands gravely when they parted Sunday night. Polly slipped a sheet from her paper-pad folded until it was only a small scrap, into Bobby's fingers as she left him at the foot of the front stairs.

"It's a secret," she informed him solemnly. "Don't you look at it till you're in the cars tomorrow, and don't you ever tell, will you? I just wanted you to know it—that's all! Do you promise?"

"Of course," said the boy grandly as he put the slip of paper in his pocket. "I never tell a secret. George Rogers and I have them by the dozen. Boys are not like girls, you know."

Polly went up two stairs, then she turned and looked down at the boy, who was gazing at her through his spectacles. She drew a quick breath, and clasped her little hands.

"Am I—am I anything like your sister Eleanor that died?" she whispered.

The boy looked at her with a puzzled frown.

"Like Eleanor," he repeated slowly. "You look like her—a little—but you don't act like her—not at all. I guess though"—the boy choked and then went on, "there aren't many girls like Eleanor. Why, I didn't see how we were going to get along when she came here to live with Aunt Hetty, and she didn't either, though we expected to see each other every little while. But now—good-by," said the boy abruptly, and he went into the library and shut the door behind him.

"Oh dear!" sobbed poor little Polly as she undressed in her pretty room. "This is a beautiful place, and they're just as good to me, but I feel awful lonesome!"

She was somewhat comforted when Miss Pome-roy gave her a message from the boy the next morning.

"Bobby charged me to tell you that he should be thinking up charades for you and him to act when he comes back," said Miss Hetty at breakfast, "and he wanted you to think of some too."

"Yes'm, I will," said Polly with a faint smile.

"She misses Bobby," said Miss Pomeroy to Arctura later in the morning, "and I'm sorry it is such a dark, rainy day, and that we are old, Arctura, instead of being young. I mean old for companions for a little girl," she added, knowing Miss Green's occasional sensitiveness on the point of age.

"I've felt about a hundred for the last week," said Arctura frankly, "for I've been having neuralgia in my jaw and thereabouts. I feel pretty safe from it now—it went off yesterday. But I shouldn't want to risk the change of air, sitting up in the garret. But why not send Polly up there this afternoon, and see what comes of it? I'll go up and lay out the things we spoke of the other day."

"Very well," said Miss Pomeroy, "that would be the best thing for a day like this, I am sure."

So it happened that when the tall clock had struck three and Polly knew her hour on the bed had been accomplished, she stole softly along the upper hall and opened the door that led up to the garret. As she began to mount the narrow stairs the old poor-farm seemed to dance before her eyes. Polly's head throbbed and her feet seemed heavy as if they were weighted.

"I don't care much about this garret, I guess," she said as she climbed slowly up the stairs. "They told me there were some things I'd like to see, but I don't believe they know what a little girl likes, excepting Eleanor. Miss Pome-roy said she hadn't been up here this spring, on account of her poor knee. I presume maybe there are more books. I love Mr. Hans Christian Andersen, but the words bob all around to-day. I don't believe I feel so very well."

When Polly had climbed the last stair she stood in the garret and looked about her. There were two big windows, one at each end of the long, low room, which let in the afternoon light. She sniffed the dry fragrance of some bunches of everlasting, hanging from a big post, and the scent of a row of clove-filled apples in a doorless closet near the head of the stairs. Each apple stood guard over a long white bag ; on each bag was a label.

"'Pieces of brown broadcloth and black serge,'" read Polly from one label. She touched the only unmarked bag, and it gave forth a soft rustle. "Silk," said Polly, and she smoothed the outside of the bag again and again and listened to the sound from within. After a few minutes she

walked slowly to the centre of the garret and stood perfectly still.

"There are books and books," she said, turning her head to look at the shelves placed here and there about the room. "And there's another window, a little low one—Oh—Oh!"

Polly made a sudden dash across the old creaking boards to the window, and as she did so Arc-tura, listening in the room below, smiled with much satisfaction and walked to Miss Pomeroy's door which opened to her knock.

"I guess I've calculated about right this time," she said joyfully. "If you'd heard her fly across to that window you wouldn't have any doubts left. And Marm Hackett is down-stairs waiting to see you, for the third time within four days isn't it? She's brought her knitting-work and I should judge she'd come prepared to stay to tea!"

Polly's dash across the garret floor ended abruptly in front of the little window under the eaves. There on a broad window-sill with her back to the light sat a wonderful old doll. Her head was covered with bright yellow curls; they lay on her forehead and fell on her shoulders. Her red lips were set in a steady, smiling curve and her round blue eyes stared, unwinking, up in

Polly's face. She was dressed in a gown of silk ; green and white blocks made the pattern, with little lines of pink to mark them off. The short sleeves and low neck (for the gown was cut to display the doll's beautiful shoulders) were edged with narrow lace. There were two ruffles on the skirt from below which the slippered feet stuck out stiffly, showing several inches of white stocking.

"Oh, you dear dolly !" cried the little girl in an ecstasy. "Won't I have a good time with you ?"

Then, all at once, Polly's outstretched hands fell at her sides.

"I believe you've been put here for a test," she said sadly, "same as Mrs. Manser told me things would probably be. Or else they've forgotten you're here. Because of course if Miss Pomeroy had 'proved of dollies she'd have had you come right down-stairs the very first day I got here."

She edged away from the window, her hands tightly clasped behind her back.

"Maybe even Eleanor would have looked at you, while she read," said Polly to the siren, "but I shan't play with you, dolly, not till they say so, and of course they won't ever, because I'm such a big girl now, they think."

Polly shook her head at the smiling doll, took a book from a low shelf near the window and seated herself in a little rocking-chair close by. The doll appeared to watch her narrowly.

"Please don't look at me that way, dolly!" pleaded the little girl. "You wouldn't want me to lose my chance after all this time, and when I've tried so hard! And it's 'most two weeks now I've been just as much like Eleanor as ever I could! I don't s'pose I'd lose the chance now, really, but Miss Pomeroy would be disappointed in me, dolly, you know she would!"

Still the doll smiled. Polly threw herself on the floor, with her head in the cushion of the little rocking-chair. Her cheeks grew hotter and hotter.

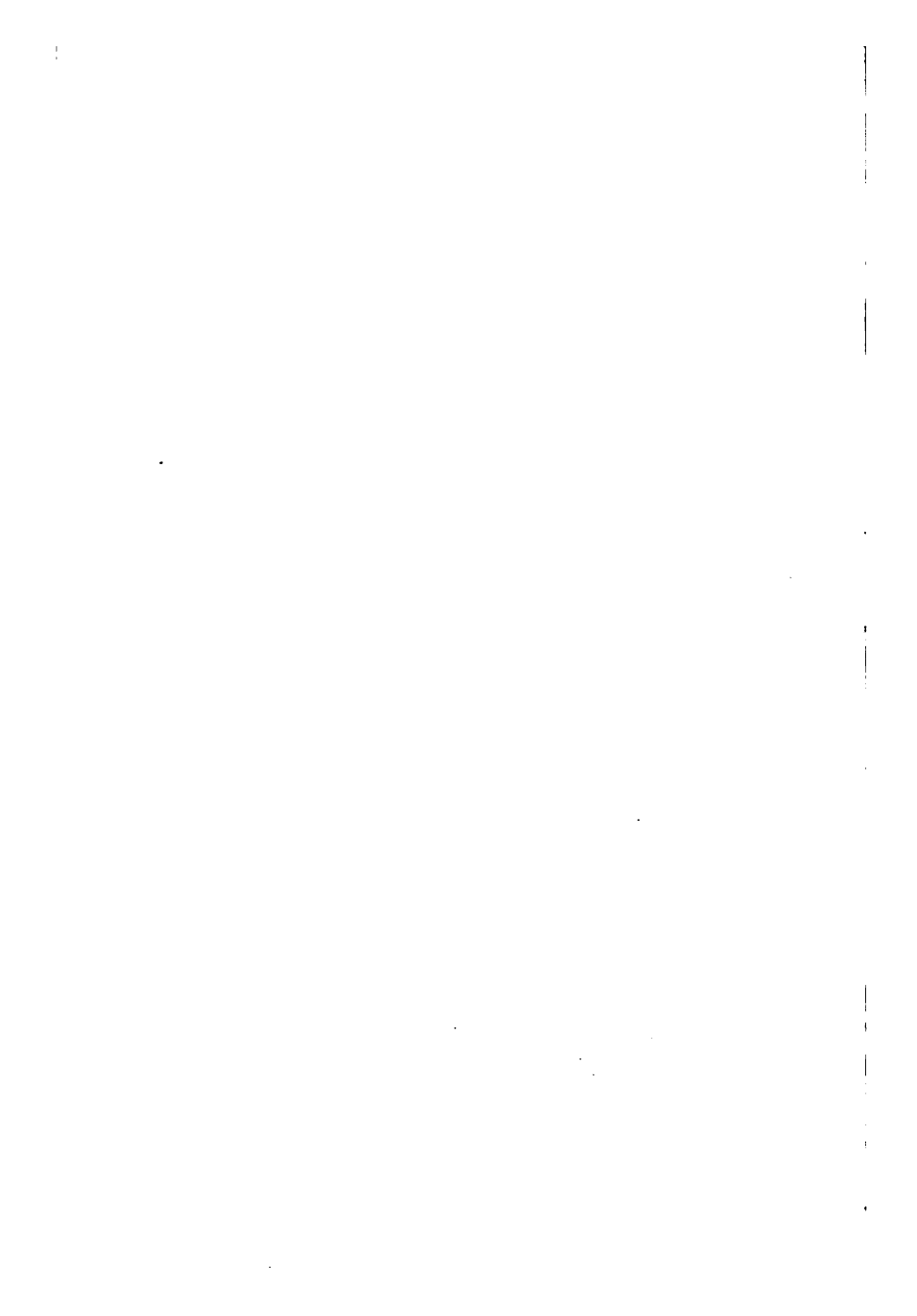
"Oh dear!" she cried despairingly. "Isn't that doll naughty? And my head feels as if it were somebody else's and it goes round and round!"

It was five o'clock when footsteps roused the little worn-out sleeper, who sat up hastily, staring at Arctura Green with eyes that were unnaturally bright. A brilliant color flamed all over Polly's face.

"I didn't touch her!" she cried in a high,



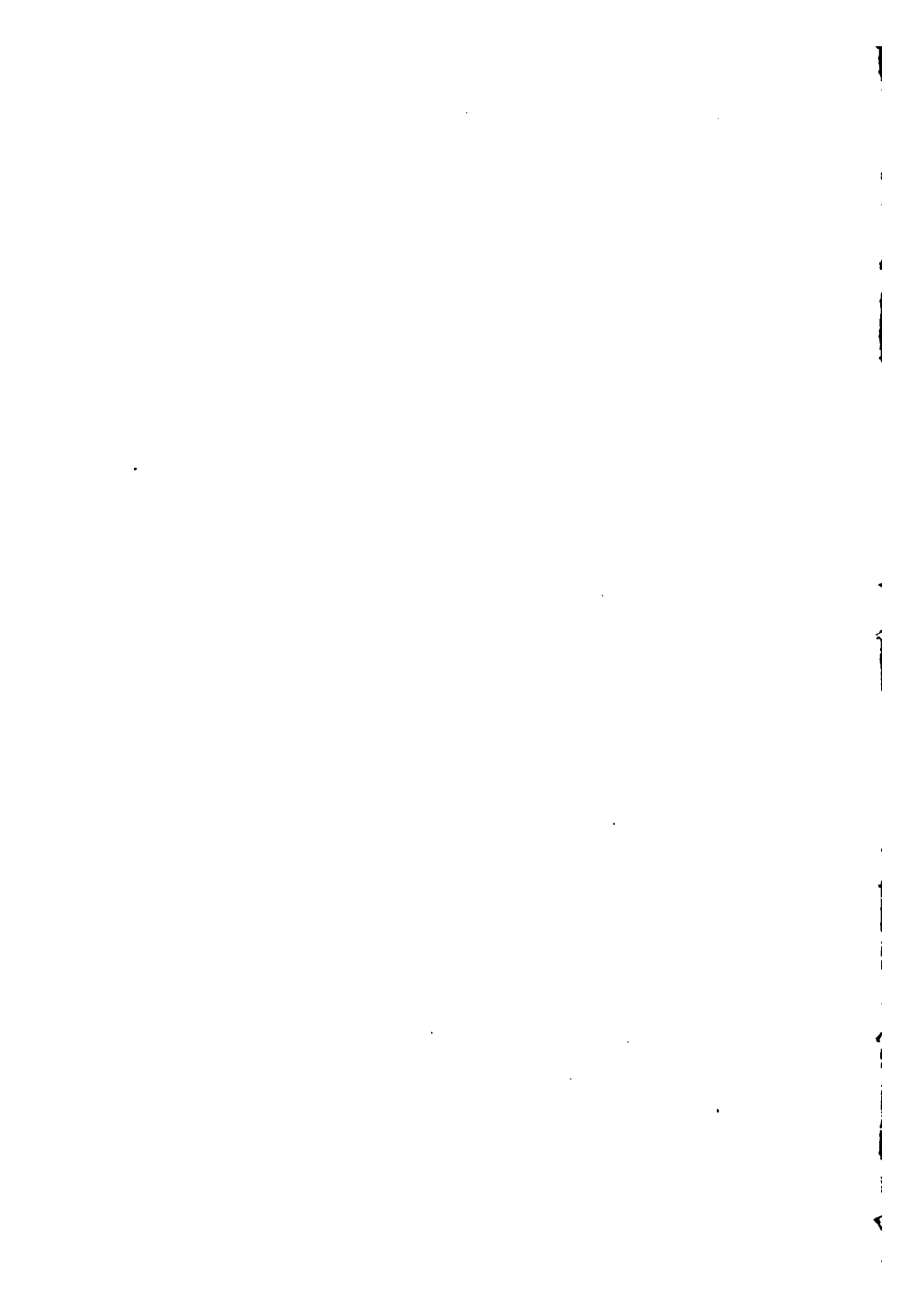
POLLY THREW HERSELF ON THE FLOOR



strained voice. "But I'm not Eleanor, and I'm not Mary! I'm just Polly! I always was Polly, before your ear-trumpet and Grandma Manser's little girl that died and the shingles and all the other things!"

Arctura stooped, gathered the child up in her strong arms, and carried her down-stairs to her bed. Then she went to her own window and called Hiram from the barn.

"Do you march into the house," said she, and say to Miss Pomeroy I need her up-stairs. And do you tell Marm Hackett that little Mary's sick and it's just as likely to be a catching fever as not. And when you've done that and seen her started (it won't delay you more'n a minute) do you harness Daisy and drive for the doctor as fast as you can drive!"



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CHAPTER XX

UNCLE BLODGETT'S JOURNEY

UNCLE BLODGETT seldom took any notice of the weather. He frequently remarked that when most of a person's time was spent in a wood-shed it made very little difference whether the sun shone or not. But for two days he had surveyed the sky with much impatience.

"I hate to be balked when I set out to do a thing," he grumbled to Mrs. Ramsdell when Monday drew to its close without a ray of sunlight. "Here we were all house-ridden Sunday on account of the rain, and Polly probably counting on seeing us after church. And then Miss Peebles getting her letter all written last night, ready for me to take to-day, and this weather holding on. I vum I'm going to-morrow whether or no!"

"I would," said Mrs. Ramsdell who stood beside him in the shed doorway, looking out over the mist-enshrouded fields. "Someway I've got the feeling Polly needs one of us and you seem

to be the only one able. Supposing you step out into the road and see how the vane stands now? It appears to me as if those clouds right overhead were breaking a mite."

"I don't care in which quarter the wind lays, nor whether it's backing or hauling or what it's doing," said Uncle Blodgett doggedly. "I'm a-going to see that child to-morrow if I'm spared."

"I respect you for it," said Mrs. Ramsdell. She opened and shut her lips a number of times before she added her final word. "If you didn't go, I should. I should die in my tracks, but I'd full as soon end that way as some other."

The next morning's sun brought hope to the little band of old people, though Mrs. Manser who knew nothing of their plans stated lugubriously that as it had cleared in the night it would surely rain again soon. She stared when she saw Mr. Blodgett in his Sunday suit clambering stiffly into the wagon with Father Manser's help.

"Where are you bound, Samuel Blodgett?" she called querulously from the kitchen, as her husband gathered up the reins.

"I'm starting for the town of Mapleton proper,

ma'am," roared Mr. Blodgett, making a trumpet of his hands. "And more than likely I shall do some visiting and not return till night. It seemed a good chance as Father Manser so seldom makes two trips a day. And if I should go to Jericho and back there's enough sawed and split to last ye! Start along, Father."

"I don't know as Mrs. Manser relished your speaking quite so firm," said Mr. Manser, his mild face lined with anxiety. "You see she isn't accustomed to it."

Uncle Blodgett eyed him shrewdly before he spoke, then "Anybody would know she wasn't, to look at you," was all he vouchsafed.

The old man had not been in the village on a week-day for more than two years. Father Manser usually did all his errands when he went down for the evening mail, and in any case Uncle Blodgett preferred to remain at home. The few old friends who were left had families and possessions of their own, and the dweller at Manser Farm had nothing but his pride to hug.

Before the village church spire came in sight Uncle Blodgett's plan of action was arranged. The post-office stood at the corner of an alley which led into a sort of court in which were three

old wooden buildings. At almost every town meeting it was announced with decision that the old houses should be torn down without delay. But the owner of the property lived in the far West and paid no attention to the various letters which had been sent him. There the houses stood, year after year.

"You hitch your horse same as usual," commanded Mr. Blodgett as they passed the last of the straggling cottages which served as outposts for the town, "and I'll step down into the court and sit on Gleason's outside flight. It's sunny there, and there'll be nobody to make talk with me. Then you keep a sharp look out for the Pomeroy woman ; if she comes, you step round the corner of the alley and summon me. If it's the man that comes, and he's alone, you ask him if he could give Samu'l Blodgett a lift along the road as far as the bridge. He'll think I'm going off beyond the marsh to see Hen Ransom. Don't you tell him my business, but if he speaks favorable, you let me know. If he's offish, you wait till he's started for home before you step foot into the court. I'm prepared to walk the whole distance if need be."

Father Manser was so impressed by the note of

authority in the old man's voice that he did not offer one objection to this plan. He had two errands to do before mail time, so that the usual group had not yet gathered on the post-office steps when he deposited Uncle Blodgett at the desired spot. The tall, gaunt figure, slightly bent by rheumatism, passed unnoticed down the alley and into the deserted court.

Gleason had been a harness-maker of some note in his day, and one of Uncle Blodgett's friends. His shop took the lower part of the building and the rooms above it where he lived with his wife and crippled son were reached by a flight of outside steps which led to a little balcony. From the centre of the balcony opened a front door of generous width. Uncle Blodgett looked up at it, leaning on his old umbrella, before he took his seat on the lowest step.

"It's sagged considerable—just like all the rest of us," he muttered. "I'm glad Gleason's gone where it can't trouble him, he hated to see anything off the plumb. He'd be eighty-two if he was living to-day, and Mrs. Gleason, she'd be seventy-four, and poor Charlie he'd be fifty-one. I expect they're all feeling about of an age, young as ever they want to, where they are.

That's the way I'll be feeling too, when I get rid o' this old hulk I'm carrying round. Seems heavier and stiffer'n usual since little Polly went off."

The sun shone, went into clouds, shone again, vanished for a time, and finally came out bright and strong while the old man sat there on the steps. He heard the rattle of wagons, the sound of horses' hoofs and men's feet, and voices calling cheerfully in the street. At first he looked simply expectant, then hopeful, then anxious, and deep lines of trouble showed in his face when at last Father Manser came hurrying toward him down the alley.

"Nobody came from Pomeroy Oaks," said the little man in a tone of distress, "but the fishman's just starting off that way on an extra trip with some lobsters he's got to sell. Are you willing I should speak to him? He'd help you along part of the way."

"And keep his tongue wagging about it for a month afterward," said Uncle Blodgett, rising stiffly to his feet. "No sir, no fishmen for me! You drive me out beyond the tin-shop and then set me down, and I'll foot it along and take my time."

Ten minutes later the main street of the village was deserted, for the dinner hour was drawing near. Uncle Blodgett mounted to his seat once more and the two men drove in silence to the little tin-shop and beyond it to a curve in the road.

"Stop here," commanded Uncle Blodgett, and presently he was standing in the road, gravely testing his legs.

"I'm as spry as a colt," he said reassuringly to his companion. "Sitting in the sun so long limbered me all up. Never you fear for me. I'll get there and back one way or another. Mind you keep my enterprise from your wife till I'm home again."

"I guess 'would be better to," said Father Manser. "Here, you wait a minute." He fumbled under the wagon-seat, and brought out a big paper bag which he thrust into the old man's hands.

"There's crackers and gingersnaps," he said hurriedly and under his breath, "and here's my tin cup. There's a spring about two miles from here at the left of the road, kind of hidden. Maybe you know where 'tis."

"Liph Gleason and I've sat up on the rocks

side of it many a time," said Uncle Blodgett. He stuffed the bag into the hollow of his left arm, then stood looking down at the tin cup, turning it over and over in his hands. At last he put it in his pocket, and held out his knotted fingers.

"I'd like to shake hands with ye, and have a good-luck word," he said. "Sometimes I've wished I'd married, and then again I've seen folks warped and spoiled by being married and I've been glad I'd stayed single. But when I consider your case—I see that if the material is extra good, it can't be warped. Good-by to ye—sir."

"Good-by and good luck to you— and my best love to little Polly," said Father Manser, and he scrambled into the wagon, his mild face suffused with blushes, and turned the horse's head toward home.

CHAPTER XXI

HAPPY AT LAST

WHILE Uncle Blodgett trudged along the road that led to Pomeroy Oaks the house among the big trees was still as still could be, for little Polly was asleep at last.

The doctor had driven away at eleven o'clock, promising to call again at night, and charging the household not to make an unnecessary sound.

"Let her sleep right through the day if she will," he said to Miss Pomeroy under whose kind eyes were shadows that told of a wakeful night. "My opinion is that she'll sleep it off and wake up all right again, though she will be pretty weak. You see the child has had nothing but anxiety and excitement for the last two or three weeks, and living a different life from what she's used to, she's been running down and ended up with this touch of fever."

"I feel as if I'd hurt some little wild-woods creature," said Miss Pomeroy sadly. "In her

delirium last night I've found out everything the poor child has kept to herself for these weary days. I'm afraid she'll never be happy with me, now. And yet I meant to do my very best for her. You see it's all been a mistake."

"Now see here," said the doctor who had known Miss Pomeroy all his life, "the wrong was all done by Mrs. Manser, and I shall give her the most disagreeable half hour she's had for years, to-morrow. There would have been no mistakes or misunderstandings if she hadn't been such a selfish woman. And as for little Polly, she'll be as gay as a lark before the summer's over. Don't try to explain everything to her at once, that's all. It would be a first-rate idea if you could let Hiram bring some one of those old people here to see her within a day or two. Perhaps Mr. Blodgett. I've seen the child with him again and again when I've driven over to the farm for one reason or another."

"Hiram shall go for him the first thing in the morning, rain or shine," said Miss Hetty, as she shook the doctor's hand in both of hers.

Half-way down the road Hiram and Arctura were lined up side by side under one of the great oaks. Arctura's eyes were red and her face was

swollen, but she glared defiance at the doctor as he drew up before them. She tried to speak, but Hiram was first for once.

"You tell us what her chances are?" he demanded. "Tura and I aren't children that you've got to mince things with us, nor smooth 'em over. What's the little girl's chances for getting well?"

"All the chances in the world," said the doctor stoutly. "What you two people want to do is to be ready to help her get strong again as fast as ever she can, so she won't miss any of the beautiful summer weather that will soon be here."

"Kingdom come!" said Hiram turning to Arctura as the doctor whipped up his horse and drove on. But Miss Green's face was in her apron and she made no audible reply.

The brother and sister walked quickly up the road down which they had carried such heavy hearts. Just before they separated Arctura put down her apron and dried her eyes.

"I'm going to cook up a big batch of caraway cookies, Hiram," said she, "and you'd better believe I'm glad to do it! She loves 'em, you know."

"I would, 'Tura," said the brother gently, "I

would so, my girl. And as for me, I'll find a harness to polish up, and I believe I could polish the church spire, I've got such strength in me."

While Arctura rolled out dough sprinkled thickly with caraway seeds and cut it into leaves and stars, Miss Pomeroy sat in Polly's room and listened to the little girl's soft, regular breathing with a thankful heart. She laid many plans as she looked at the tumbled brown curls and the sweet face from which all the high color had faded, leaving it paler than ever before.

Then while Miss Pomeroy ate a hasty lunch, Arctura kept the watch. Her mind was busy with many things, but she did not stir in her seat save once, when a curl had strayed down so far that it touched Polly's eyelid. Scarcely daring to breathe, Arctura stood on tiptoe and reaching over the bed, gently drew the wandering curl out of harm's way.

The afternoon wore on, and still Polly slept. It was almost four o'clock when Arctura, returning from a conference with Hiram in the barn, spied an old man making his way up the road between the great oaks. He stooped, leaning heavily on a bulging umbrella, and walking with

evident weariness and pain. His clothes were very shabby and his boots were spattered with mud. As Arctura stopped to look at him, he caught sight of her, straightened himself, and tried to hurry forward, but she waved him back and gathering up her skirts well out of the mud, ran toward him.

"Stop where you are," she commanded as soon as she dared raise her voice.

"And who are you, woman, that you tell me to stop?" asked Uncle Blodgett sternly. "I've come to see a little girl that's being hid away here, from all her old friends. Polly Prentiss her name is."

"Sakes alive!" cried Arctura, grasping his arm. "What's your name?"

"Blodgett—Samu'l Blodgett," said the old man, "but my name's nothing to do with it. Let go of my raiment, so I can pass! I tell ye, let go!"

"Praise be!" said Miss Green fervently. "You give me that umbrella, and take my arm up to the house. If you aren't a dealing of Providence sent in the nick o' time, then I never expect to see one. We were going to send for you, to-morrow. Little Polly's sick—but she's

going to get better," for Arctura was startled at the sudden change in the stern old face.

Uncle Blodgett had at first disclaimed her arm, but now he seized it as a welcome prop.

"My strength's gone all of a sudden," he said, looking pitifully at Arctura. "You say she's getting better? Is that what you said?"

When he had been reassured and comforted, and had been further stayed by a cup of tea, he told of his journey along the road, which had been weary enough and without adventure.

"There wasn't a team passed me either way," said Uncle Blodgett as he sat in the kitchen with Arctura for audience to his narrative. "I fared along without trouble, but 'twas pretty slow work, and toward the last there was more uphill road and my j'int's are not so limber as they were fifty years ago. But I rested here and there and one time I sat down for quite a spell to eat the excellent luncheon that had been provided for me, and drink some fine spring water that was handy by. I left the village at about quarter to twelve and I see now," said Uncle Blodgett taking an old silver watch from his pocket, "that it's only just four. All things considered, I call it that I made pretty good time."

"Where'd you get that watch?" demanded Arctura. "Let me look at it."

"Well now you be careful of it," cautioned Uncle Blodgett as he handed it to her. "I set great store by that. I've never let a single soul at Manser Farm see it. I've kept it well out o' sight always for if Mrs. Manser had got news of it she'd have wanted it set up on the wall somewhere for a clock. Nobody there's ever suspicioned how I'm able to tell time so accurate. I've let 'em think I went by the sun and shadows. Rainy days I've never appeared to have any knowledge of the hours."

"Where'd you get it?" Arctura repeated her question insistently. "I never saw but one like it, case and all, and that's up-stairs in my room at this very minute. 'Twas my father's."

"Your father's!" Uncle Blodgett leaned forward in evident excitement. "Your father wasn't Peltiah Green that was in Mexico in the early forties! Don't tell me! He's never been in this town since I came back here over twenty-five years ago."

"No," said Arctura, "he died thirty-five years ago and my mother the next year after. Hiram and I have been here at Pomeroy Oaks for nearly thirty years."

Uncle Blodgett took Arctura's fingers in his lean brown hand and wrung them till she winced.

"Peltiah Green and I bought these watches from a man in Mexico when we were a pair of young fellows seeking our fortunes," he said. "He came home and I lost track of him. I've been a wanderer first and last. Here as a boy, then all over the world 'most for the next thirty years, and washed back here again by the tide of circumstances. Seeing Peltiah Green's daughter is the best piece o' fortune that's come to me for ten years anyway. I reckon I can tell you some incidents about your father maybe you've never heard. He was a likely young fellow as ever I saw."

"He lived in Nashua as a boy," said Arctura. Uncle Blodgett nodded.

"That's it!" he said. "That's the place he referred to. I recall it now."

"But when he married mother he came here to Mapleton to live with her parents and help run the farm," said Peltiah Green's daughter. "Father never travelled any more, but he used to speak of his young days sometimes as if it made him kind of restless to remember 'em."

Uncle Blodgett nodded again, and smiled

shrewdly. "I know the feeling," he said. "There's been nights even this last year when I would have started off without any real destination—if it hadn't been for little Polly." He leaned back and surveyed Arctura with much satisfaction. "I presume no doubt Miss Pomeroy's well enough in her way," he said, "but I make no account of anything so long as the little girl's under the same roof with Peltiah Green's daughter."

"We've botched things pretty well," said Arctura frankly. "I'm going to tell you all about it, and then I've got a little plan in my head I shall want you to help me carry out if Miss Pomeroy approves."

There was a good deal of soft stepping about the house for the next hour. Once or twice Polly turned in her sleep, but the big brown eyes did not open until after the clock had struck five. When at last they unclosed, a look of bewildered joy filled them, and overspread the pale little face on the pillow.

"It's Uncle Blodgett," said a voice so weak it hardly seemed to belong to Polly and yet it was no one's else. "It is you, isn't it?"

"If it ain't your Uncle Blodgett, then it's no-

body," was the answer, meant to be very steady, but having a shaky sound. "And this lady that's sitting with me—" the old man adjusted a little figure in green and white block silk so that Polly had a full view of it— "this young lady's name is Melissa, they tell me, and I understand Miss Pomeroy says that if another young lady by the name of Polly Prentiss—Polly Prentiss, mind you—sees fit to adopt Melissa, things will be very satisfactory all round."

Polly stretched out her arms for the doll, and Uncle Blodgett carefully transferred Melissa to the bed. In a minute the golden curls were resting on the pillow beside the brown ones. There came an irrepressible snuffle from the doorway where Arctura stood beside her mistress.

Polly turned on her pillow and looked toward the door.

"Oh, aren't you good!" she sighed. Then she held out one little hand to Uncle Blodgett. The other was clasped around Melissa's neck. "I feel all rested," said Polly, "all rested and well."

CHAPTER XXII

POLLY'S PARTY

It was a beautiful spring day with more than a hint of summer in the air. Everybody at Pomeroy Oaks was busy, from the mistress of the house down to Snip and Snap. Miss Pomeroy in a cool silk gown of lavender and white, which Polly had cajoled her into wearing, was arranging shawls and pillows in lounging chairs on the broad piazza. Arctura was putting the last touches to a bountiful feast spread on the dining-room table. Her apron was so stiffly starched that it rattled like castanets whenever she moved.

In the barn Hiram moved restlessly about rearranging harnesses and wagons so that all might appear to the best advantage. And as he stopped now and then to contemplate changes, he muttered snatches of verse. Snip was adorned with a neck-ruff of plaited pink ribbon, while Snap had one of blue. They sat side by side in a secluded corner of the piazza trying to eat

off these unwelcome decorations, as it seemed impossible to get rid of them by any of the other methods at their command.

As for Polly, she ran from the parlor to the kitchen, from the piazza to the barn, with a heart as light as her heels. She wore the blue and white gingham which had come in the old enamel cloth bag from Manser Farm.

"I love my pretty new dresses that you've given me," Polly had said earnestly as she sat on the piazza steps with her head on Miss Pome-roy's knees the night before, "but they all helped make my gingham you see, and I believe they'd feel at home right off if I wore that. Don't you believe they would?"

"I'm quite sure they would," said Miss Hetty cordially, so the matter was settled.

"I expect they'll be all jolted up, Melissa, that's what I expect," confided Polly to her adopted daughter as the hour of twelve drew near, "but I guess they're so glad to come to my party they won't mind. And did I tell you about the new horse Father Manser's bought to go with Prince? Who do you suppose gave him the money, Melissa? I guess we know! 'Twouldn't be but just one person, would it?"

And who's sent them those chairs Uncle Blodgett told me about last week when he was here?" Polly squeezed the doll affectionately and then seated her in a small rocking-chair on the piazza. "You sit right there," she told the smiling Melissa, "and you'll see the hay-cart with chairs and all of them in it, when it comes round the curve. You've got just as good a place as anybody could have!"

It was not more than five minutes after twelve when Polly heard the trot, trot of horses' hoofs over the bridge.

"Please come quick!" she cried running to the library door. "You know you said we'd stand right together on the steps. And sha'n't we wave our handkerchiefs? Don't you think 'twould be nice?"

"Perfectly delightful!" said Miss Pomeroy as she hurried out beside the little girl.

"Oh, Arctura, you wave too, won't you?" called Polly, as Miss Green appeared in the porch door.

"Well, I guess that's what I've got two handkerchiefs for," came the answer as a couple of large white squares were unfurled and flung to the breeze. "And you cast your eyes to the barn door."

Polly did as she was bidden and was rewarded with the sight of Hiram who bore aloft one of his sister's aprons tied like a banner to an old hoe handle. The child clapped her hands with delight, but the man stood solemnly drawn up like a soldier in the doorway without a glance in her direction.

"I know he's chuckling, if I were near enough to hear him," whispered Polly to Miss Pomeroy. "Oh—oh, why where—" she stopped, speechless as a big, low-hung wagon came into view under the great oaks. Then she turned and flung herself into Miss Hetty's arms.

"You've given it to them! That bee-yo-tiful wagon!" she cried. "There never was anybody else so good! Never!"

"Look around, Polly, quick!" commanded Miss Pomeroy. "Where's that handkerchief you were so anxious to wave?"

The little girl faced about and waved her handkerchief wildly, as Father Manser, sitting erect and with an air of mild gayety, rounded the last curve and drew up, with a flourish before the steps. Beside him was Bob Rust, bewildered but happy. In the next seat Grandma Manser and Aunty Peebles sat close together, holding each other's

hands, and behind them were Mrs. Ramsdell and Uncle Blodgett. Everybody was dressed in Sunday best, and each of the old ladies had a new bonnet.

"You've no need to introduce us," said Mrs. Ramsdell to Polly as the wagon stopped. "I guess maybe you don't know it, but Miss Pomeroy's been over to see us twice while you've been so busy getting strong again." As she hugged and kissed the little girl she had another word to say.

"She's got what I call most excellent taste," she whispered in Polly's ear. "Poppies on my bonnet, violets for Miss Peebles, and laylocks for Grandma. I couldn't have chosen better myself."

Father Manser delivered a careful message as he shook hands with Miss Pomeroy.

"Mrs. Manser sent her respects," he said soberly, "and she hoped you'd get enjoyment enough out of the day to recompense you for your trouble. She's got a dizzy head to-day, and thought bed was the best place for her."

"It's always the best place for a person who feels that way," said Miss Pomeroy, suppressing the smile that Mrs. Ramsdell's sniff had called forth.

Then Mrs. Manser vanished from the minds of the entire party.

"Though I will say for her," admitted Mrs. Ramsdell as she took off her shawl in Polly's pretty room, "that she's been more bearable and less complaining since that leak over her bed was stopped than ever I expected to see her ; I'll say that much. Well if ever I felt a spring mattress, that's one !" and she pressed her hand on Polly's bed-spread in several places.

While the old ladies examined Polly's room and all it contained, Uncle Blodgett had a word with Arctura on the porch. Father Manser was happily engaged with Hiram in the barn, and Bob Rust had wandered out into the cow-pasture by way of a little winding path.

"Every time I see you," remarked Uncle Blodgett, "I get more of your father's look. Now your brother Hiram must favor your mother's folks. I know you say people have always told you that you two looked alike, but I can't see it—I can't see it, and I don't believe it's there to see !"

"Have it your own way," said Arctura, and they laughed together with great friendliness.

The dinner was a keen pleasure to everyone.

And for once in her life Arctura sat at table with her mistress. "I should never do this except when you are here, on an occasion," she explained carefully to Uncle Blodgett whose places was next to hers. "I never want to be getting up and sitting down, and not know whether I'm eating or not ; but take a spread like this, set on all at once, and I'm willing to run my chances with the rest."

"Dear child, I don't know as I ever saw such big strawberries as these, or ate such sweet ones," said Grandma Manser to Polly who sat at her right hand. In her lap lay something that looked like a fan. When anything was said to Grandma Manser which she did not catch, the fan was lifted to her lips ; then she heard perfectly.

"It's wonderful, the progress of invention in these days," said Mrs. Ramsdell in her most elegant manner to Miss Pomeroy. "To think that such a small article as that can put hearing right into an old lady's ears. I could wish Mr. Ramsdell was alive to witness it. He was inventive, himself. There was hardly a morning I could pour the coffee out till I'd investigated the pot, on account of his inventions for straining and so

forth. He generally worked them out in the evening. That was when we were young and had our home." Mrs. Ramsdell looked pensive for a moment, but speedily brightened up again as the pound cakes were passed.

"Little Polly's found a good home, now hasn't she?" Father Manser asked Miss Peebles, as he began on his second helping of strawberries and cream. "It seems like something in a story book."

"Dear little loving thing!" said Aunty Peebles under her breath, for fear Polly might hear. "She deserves every bit of it. But then we don't all get what we deserve—some folks don't." She glanced pointedly at her neighbor, but Father Manser was absorbed in pouring out cream.

"I don't know," he said cheerfully. "A day like this makes up for a good deal—that is, if folks need to have anything made up to them."

"Uncle Blodgett," said Polly across the table, so that all might hear, "I believe when Bob goes to bed to-night he'll think he's had the very best time he ever had in all his life. Did you know Hiram had spread a table for him in the barn where he'd rather be than anywhere else, he said,

and Hiram is waiting on him and he has just the same things to eat that we have?"

"It's no more than I should expect from a son of Peltiah Green," said Uncle Blodgett. "Some one of these bright days, Polly, I'll relate to you a few occurrences that look place in Mexico and showed out Peltiah Green's character for what it was."

"I'd love to hear them," said Polly, smiling at Uncle Blodgett and the flushed Arctura. "He must have been a splendid man."

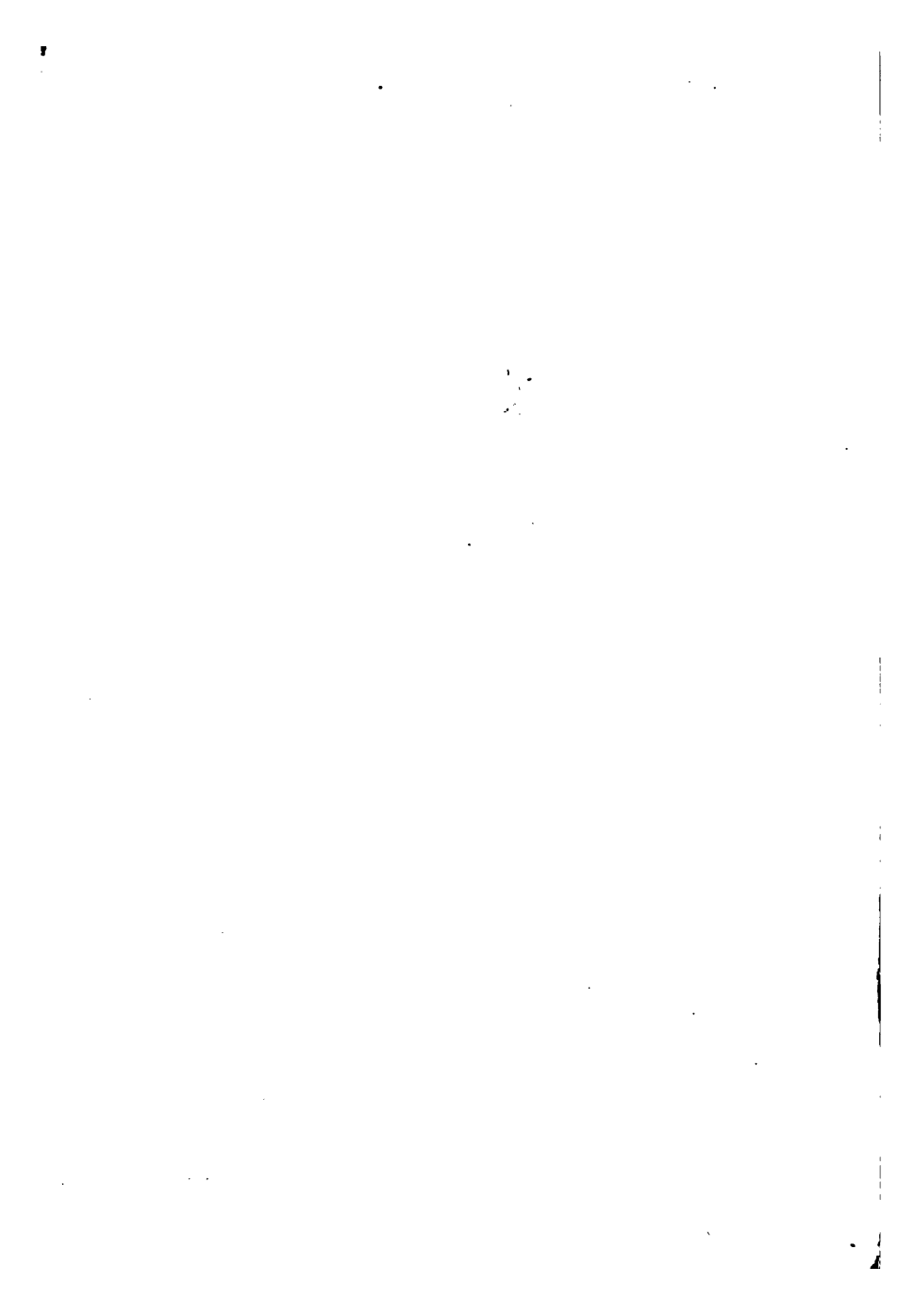
After dinner the company was settled in a group on the piazza, and there was an impromptu entertainment. First Uncle Blodgett told a wonderful tale of adventure in a far country. Beasts of great size and many varieties stalked and skulked through the windings of this narrative, and at its close the listeners sat breathless and amazed.

"That beats anything I ever heard," announced Hiram from his position on the lawn, close to the piazza rail. "I should like to hear it all over again, some day."

"Now Hiram, you please recite that poem," said the little mistress of ceremonies. She beamed on her guests as she went on. "Arctura and



SHE TOSSED HER HEAD BACK



Hiram are pretty big for me to call them by their first names, aren't they? But they want me to, so I do."

"I suspect they know you wouldn't take advantage," said Grandma Manser gently. "It isn't as if you hadn't been taught proper manners to grown folks. Children can be free without being saucy, dear child."

"Yes'm," said Polly. "Now Hiram, please!"

Then Hiram recited "Thanatopsis" with great vigor and many gestures, standing on the lawn. When he finished the applause was long and loud.

"That's a fine piece of work as ever I heard and saw," said Uncle Blodgett with enthusiasm. "Were those gestures your own choosing or were they pictured out in the book?"

"My own choosing," said Hiram with modest pride. "But when you come to gestures, there's something better than mine. Polly, you step out here and do 'Hohenlinden' for 'em."

There was prolonged clapping as Polly left her seat and took a position on the lawn where all could see her. Behind her stood Hiram with a box of articles needed for the poem. The old people sat upright at the first word, and when the

last line came they were wrought to a high pitch of excitement.

“‘And every turf beneath their feet
Shall be a soldier’s sepulchre.’”

said Polly with great solemnity. Then she stooped and firmly set a brave little flag in the close-cut grass.

“I hope she isn’t too forward,” said Aunty Peebles anxiously to Miss Pomeroy, when the storm of applause had begun to abate. “It seems as if it took real genius to recite that way, doesn’t it?”

Miss Pomeroy smiled at her gentle guest. “She’s not to study too much in any way, dear Miss Peebles,” she said. “Polly, come here, child.”

Polly ran to her, and stood leaning against her knees while Miss Pomeroy smoothed the brown curls.

“Do you all know who this is?” asked Polly of the guests. “This lady that I’m with now?”

“Miss Pomeroy, you mean,” said Uncle Blodgett and Mrs. Ramsdell together. “Why of course we do.”

Polly shook her head so that the curls danced.

"That isn't all the answer," she said. "She is Miss Pomeroy, but she's something else, too—since day before yesterday she's been—my aunt Hetty!"

"Hooray!" said Uncle Blodgett softly; but Polly had more to say.

"And once a fortnight you're all coming over to spend the day, my Aunt Hetty says," the little girl went on, twisting Miss Pomeroy's fingers in both her hands. "And when it isn't your week to come here, my Aunt Hetty and I are going over to see you—and we shall bring Melissa because she just loves to ride in a carriage."

"She seems to be a well-behaved young lady as far as I've seen," said Uncle Blodgett casting a critical glance over Melissa who sat simpering in her chair. "I sha'n't raise any objections to her coming."

When the wagon rolled down the driveway late in the afternoon Polly felt that the party had been a perfect success. The crowning glory had been imparted by Arctura who was finally persuaded to sing "Gayly the troubador" and "Annie Laurie," to a delighted audience.

After tea Miss Pomeroy and Polly sat on the

piazza steps and watched the moon come up over the tree-tops and sail along in the sky.

"In a letter I had last night," said Miss Pomeroy, "a boy of my acquaintance to whom a little girl once gave a slip of paper with a secret on it (" 'twas only to say I'd always been Polly, but I was trying to be Mary," murmured a voice in her ear)—"asked me to say to Miss Polly Prentiss that she was a trump. I have a suspicion that it was because she had hinted to his old aunt that he would like to be called Robert, and the old aunt began her last letter in that way, instead of saying 'Dear Bobby' as she used to do."

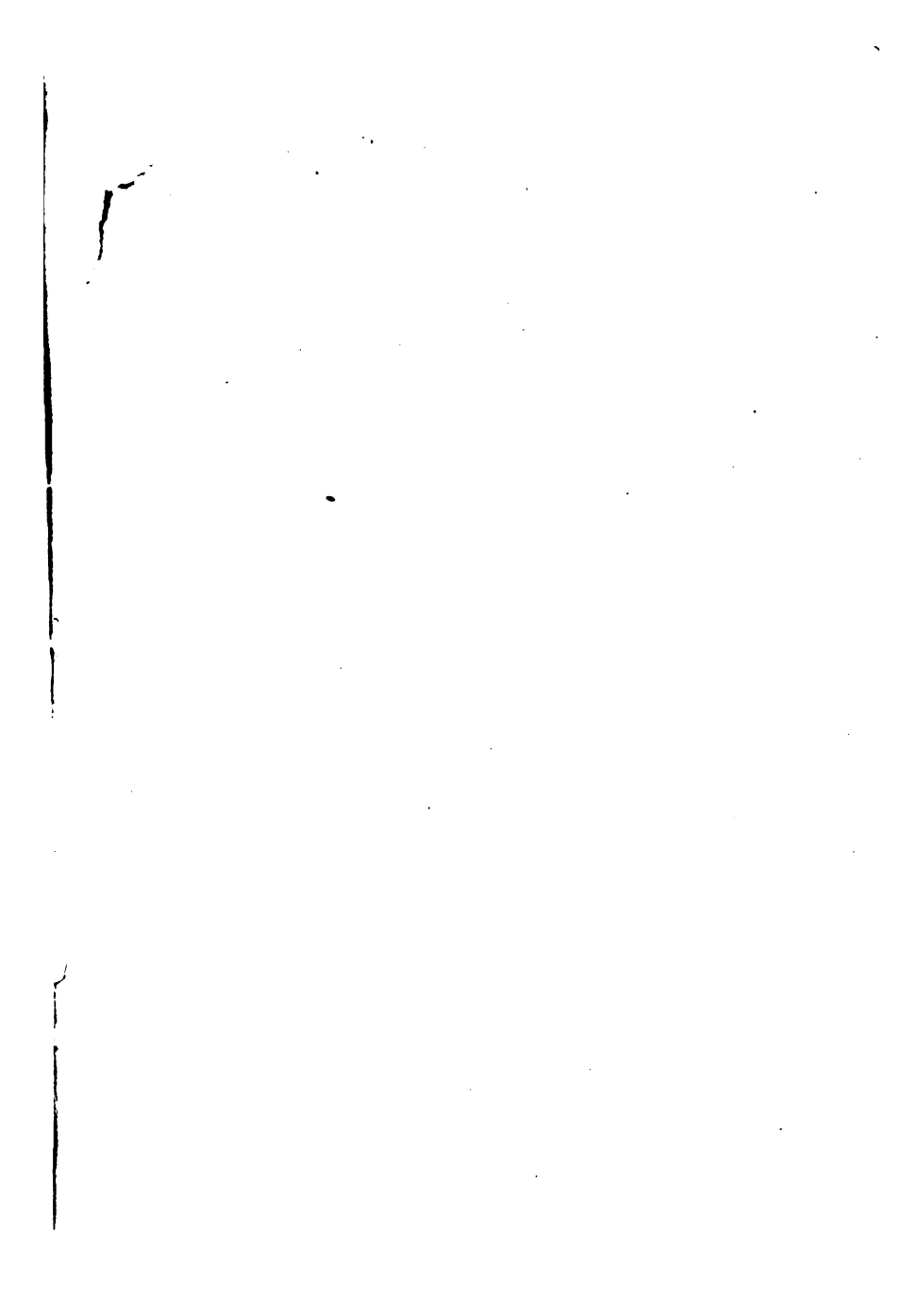
Polly nestled closer to her friend. "You aren't old," she said lovingly. "You aren't one bit old! I'm so glad I've got you! Are you glad you've got me, Aunt Hetty?"

"What do you think about it?" asked Miss Pomeroy putting her arm around the little girl and drawing her into her lap. "Listen, dear!"

The porch door was open and in it stood Arctura singing softly to the moon—

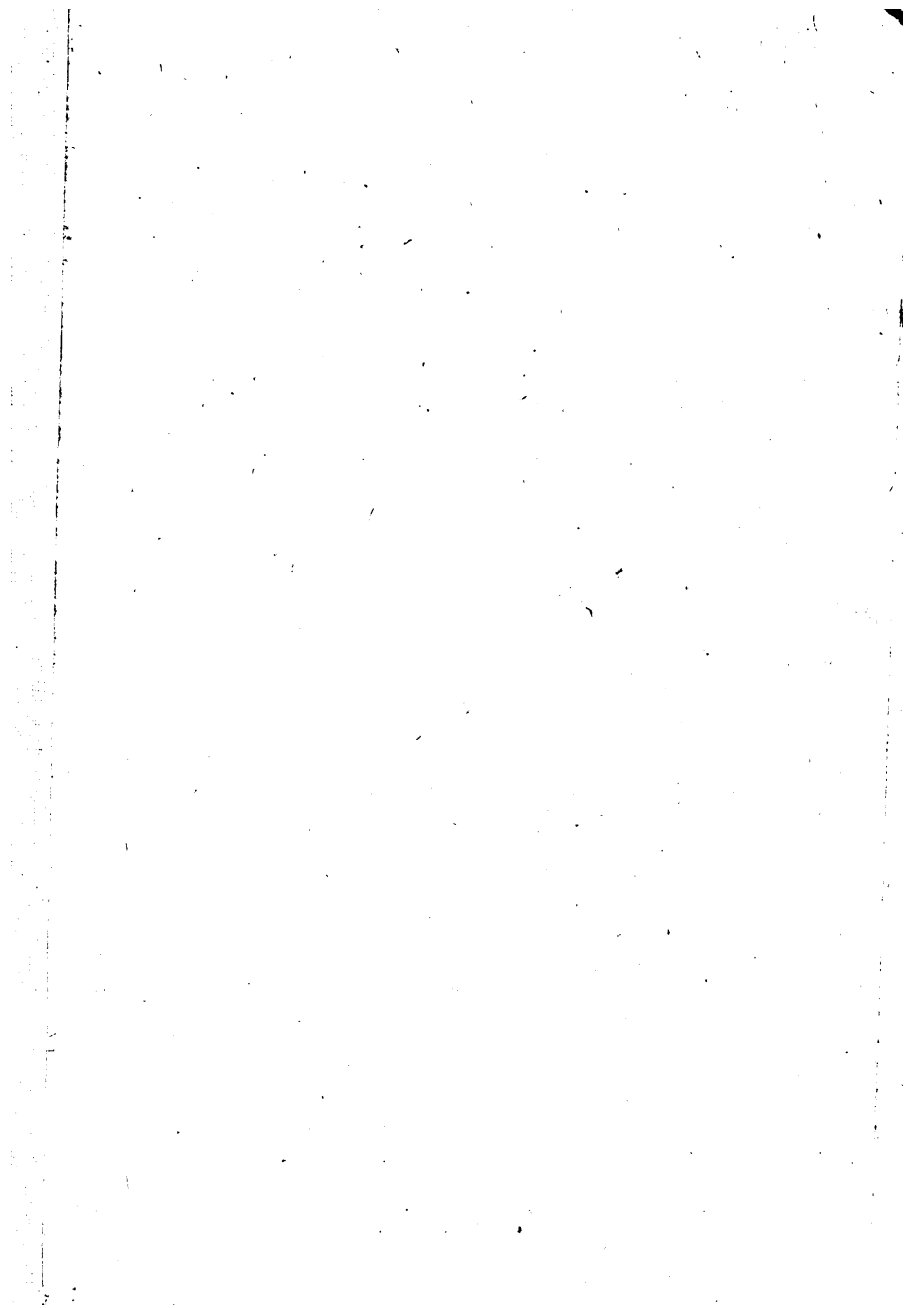
"For—she was as beautiful as a butterfly
And as proud as a queen,
Was pretty little Polly Perkins
Of Abingdon Green."

H G









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